THE GALAXY

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SUSAN ERTZ

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THE GALAXY

By SUSAN ERTZ

MADAME CLAIRE
NINA
AFTER NOON
THE WIND OF COMPLICATION
NOW EAST, NOW WEST
THE GALAXY

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BY SUSAN ERTZ

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CHAPTER I

Laura Alicia Deverell was born on May 10th, 1862, at precisely a quarter past one o'clock on a Thursday morning. Those interested in that pseudo-science astrology or astromancy may trace her life and character, if they wish, among the stars, where no doubt it is all written.

She opened her eyes upon a large, dark bedroom, badly illuminated by gas, in a house in Mecklenburg Square. A competent midwife pronounced her a splendid child, and Mrs. Deverell, as soon as she could speak, apologized to Mr. Deverell, as soon as he could be found at Mott's where he was spending the evening, for having produced a child of the wrong sex. He forgave her on the understanding that she did not offend again, and fled from the odour of ether—that dubious and impious modern invention that Mrs. Deverell had such difficulty in persuading her old-fashioned medical attendant to give her.

The Crimean War, most dolorous of campaigns, was just being forgotten; Garibaldi was preparing his attack on Rome under the banner "Roma o Morte!"; the American Civil War was being discussed at London dinner-tables with considerable bias in favour of the South, (for though slavery was everywhere in bad odour, the Southerners were, after all, *"gentlemen!"*); the Prince Consort had not long been dead; the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was enjoying an immense popularity; Tennyson had just finished writing "The Holy Grail"; Lord Palmerston was Prime Minister, and crinolines had not yet gone out of fashion.

The house in Mecklenburg Square belonged to the young couple's father, old General Deverell. He had served under Sir Arthur Wellesley in the Peninsular War, and was now bedridden and of a great age. His son and daughter-in-law looked upon him as a respected ancestor and paid him a hushed and dutiful visit once a day, which was all he required of them. Harry Deverell was his only son and heir, being the child of a second marriage when the General was already well on in years. The old man had his own faithful, black-gowned attendant, Mrs. Goosey, a dame of the most awful propriety, who was more like an aged black hen than a woman. She had her meals alone and took great care not to mix with the servants. In this somewhat difficult and unusual household young Mrs. Deverell spent two not very happy years. She was a light-hearted creature then, deeply interested in fashion, and full of the little tricks and pettinesses which became the average young woman of her day as friskings and a show of claws become a kitten.

Harry Deverell was thirty when he married her. He met her at her first London ball and fell in love with a round head prettily dressed with flowers and curls, a pair of plump shoulders, and a flow of arch and innocent conversation sprinkled with borrowed opinions. Her name was Rosa Morgan, her father had a small place in Monmouthshire and she was wild to marry and live in London.

Like many of the young men of his day, Harry Deverell was acquainted with two kinds of women, and two only; there were the "soiled doves" encountered in places of public entertainment, and there were the sheltered matrons and maidens met with in drawing-rooms. It was considered desirable for a young man to extend his acquaintance with the first as far as possible before settling down to domesticity with the second. This rule Harry followed punctiliously, for he was a thoroughly conventional person. He even, upon his marriage, learnt crotchet and *petit point,* but these amusements were beginning to pall when it was discovered that a child was on the way, an event which afforded him an opportunity of resuming, for a while, his old life, for Rosa could no longer go out. She succumbed—not without satisfaction—to the exigencies of her delicate state, and Harry got in touch again with some of his male companions and once more began the rounds of the night places—Limmer's, Mott's, the Cremorne, the Argyll, the Café Riche.

But with a difference which did him some credit. He was fond of his little Rosa, though too much of her society bored him at that time—his complete subjugation to family life came later—and he now avoided the familiarities of the "soiled doves" and contented himself with drinking a good deal and playing boisterous practical jokes in the company of his friends Arthur York and Arthur Sutcliffe, afterwards Lord Doxendale. These pranks presently became the talk of London, echoes of them resounded even in polite drawing-rooms, and only after Arthur York had been accidentally killed by a policeman's truncheon too energetically wielded in a fray, did they cease. They are still sometimes recounted by the aged and reminiscent bore, particularly the letting loose of a sackful of large and fierce sewer rats in mixed company upon the floor of one of the best known places of public entertainment in London. This was Arthur Sutcliffe's idea, and it was his one bid for fame. As Lord Doxendale he became unfertile and obscure and was only twice heard of again; once when he was robbed in a railway carriage, and once again at his death.

When Laura was barely a year old the General died, leaving such a large sum to Mrs. Goosey that there was a considerable scandal about it. Harry was strongly advised not to contest the will, which had been drawn up when the General's health, both mental and physical, could be considered above suspicion, so Mrs. Goosey ended her days the owner of a carriage and pair and a nice little house in Cheyne Walk, and the old man's attachment to his nurse-companion remained one of the major mysteries of the young people's lives. Rosa used sometimes to see Mrs. Goosey driving in the Park, sitting bolt upright in her stiff and awful black, as ugly and unlovely an old woman as ever wore bombazine.

Rosa made up her mind that she must leave the house in Mecklenburg Square at the earliest possible moment, but this Harry was reluctant to do, though for no better reason than that he had been born there. So Rosa had to use wiles, and these took the form of fainting fits, hysterics, and the seeing, on suitable occasions, of her father-in-law's ghost. The ugly old house had got badly on her nerves and undoubtedly the hysterics would, in the course of time, have become genuine enough, and a fixed habit. The outside of the house was dismal and dilapidated, the interior almost as bad. The basement crawled with black beetles, and was dark and insanitary. The dining-room was funereal and smelt of crumbs, boiled cabbage and cheese. It had in it a massive mahogany side-board, a red turkey carpet, a huge wine-cooler, a mahogany table which would seat twenty-four people, two dozen leather-seated mahogany chairs, and dark red rep curtains draping the high windows. The drawing-room was large and cold and possessed two back-to-back ottomans in yellow satin, many pier glasses, wax flowers under glass cases, a terrible ormolu clock, and, hanging from hideous gilt cornices, dark green plush curtains with faded yellow streaks. Finally, the General's ghost, twice seen by Rosa upon the stairs in a single day, brought on an attack of hysterics lasting over two hours, and Harry at last consented to sell the house and everything that in there was.

For some time past Rosa had had her round blue eyes upon a house in Kensington Square, and this she got. While not being at all of a literary turn of mind she was much impressed by the discovery that Kensington Square had been at different periods the home of Addison, Talleyrand, the Duchesse de Mazarin, John Stuart Mill, and Mr. Thackeray. It was cheerful, open, healthy, and for the baby, Laura, the proximity of the Park was a great convenience.

For days before they moved, Rosa could have been seen in the double-fronted brick house, directing the disposal of the new furniture. She would alight with one of the maids from the hired brougham in her bonnet and short jacket and full-skirted dress with hideous scalloped flounces—a costume that banished all her youth and grace—and go bustling from room to room and up and down the stairs with eager, excited face. Harry kept out of the way, hating confusion and disorder. The house contained a powder-closet for the dressing of ladies' hair in earlier days, and Rosa showed it to her friend Florrie Peddler, who often came in to see how she was getting on.

"Isn't it quaint?" Rosa said. "I'm glad I didn't live in those days. What a lot of bother ladies must have been put to, to look nice."

Since the house was built, early in the eighteenth century, it had hardly been touched, and the downstairs rooms were all panelled with the original Queen Anne woodwork. The craze for æsthetic culture not having dawned as yet, Rosa decided to leave the walls as they were for the present, though she didn't particularly care for them. At the end of the front hall was a door leading to the garden, a narrow strip of ground where Rosa thought of planting lilies of the valley in great profusion until Harry decided it had better be filled up with shrubbery.

The furniture she had bought for the house was not very unlike the furniture in Mecklenburg Square, but it was on a lighter, smaller scale. Rosa loved the more feminine furniture of the time—the little black chairs and tables ornamented with painted flowers and inlaid with mother-of-pearl, the wool-work fire screens, the fitted mahogany sewing-tables, the footstools and tidies. For her walls she bought prints and steel engravings, at Harry's suggestion, and both he and her friends thought the house a miracle of taste.

They had not long been installed when Rosa once again became the subject of hints and whispers, and in due course she had the joy of knowing that she had given Harry a son and heir, whom they agreed to call James Harold Alexander Morgan Deverell, and to spoil in every conceivable way. A year later another girl was born, and was named Violet. The little family was then complete. Harry hoped for yet another son, but Rosa produced no more offspring. She seemed to have forgotten the trick.

The Deverells were badly off for relations. Harry had some cousins living in Richmond with whom his father had persistently quarrelled, and Rosa had an aunt and uncle—on her mother's side—living in Mayfair. These people, the Merton-Stuarts, were well-to-do, and had a large family, but they looked upon Rosa as a poor relation and her father, a heavy drinker, as a disreputable old man. They had invited her to stay with them for a season in London, and it was while she was living under their roof that she met and married Harry. One of the daughters had since married into Court circles and this still further elevated the family, so that Rosa hardly ever saw them now, and when she did, was made to feel rather more humble than she liked.

As for Rosa's father, he had proved a sad disappointment, both to her and to Harry. He lived alone on his small estate in Wales, giving shooting parties from time to time to which he invited a few congenial men friends, and otherwise leading a retired and sodden existence. Later he drank so heavily that he lost all ability to manage his affairs, fell into the hands of money-lenders and woke up one morning to find he had sold the place to pay his debts. He then went to live with a widowed sister of a religious turn of mind who lived in Anglesea, and there Harry sent him money from time to time, thankful that his father-in-law was not on his and Rosa's hands.

Mr. Morgan had seemed a highly satisfactory parent when the marriage was first agreed upon, and Harry had frequently talked of "my father-in-law's estates in Wales." Now there was nothing whatever for young James to inherit. Thanks to Mrs. Goosey, Harry's own prospects had been considerably dimmed, and there was no one at all who would be likely to die and leave him money. It seemed that fate was against him, and he sometimes talked gloomily, when the servants were not about, of going into trade, but nothing ever came of this.

He occasionally looked in at White's, but the stakes there were too high for him. He was fond of spending a morning at Tattersall's where he often met old friends and talked about horses, of which he was very fond. Sometimes his friends asked him to exercise their mounts while they were away, and Harry was very pleased to do this, for there was nothing he liked better than riding in the Park. But on the whole his time was spent about the house, or taking walks with Rosa, or accompanying her when she went shopping, or going now and again to the auction rooms to bid for an engraving.

When Laura was six, he suddenly acquired the habit of taking her out, while the nurse busied herself with the other two children. He found Laura a diverting child and it gave him satisfaction to appoint himself her instructor. He had a great many theories about the infant mind and liked directing it. He would take her for walks in the Park, talking to her all the while with infinite condescension, and people often turned to look at the tall, thin man with the peevish face framed in side-whiskers, holding by the hand a little girl wearing a shepherdess hat tilted far forward over her eyes with streamers dangling behind, high, tightly buttoned boots, a ruffled skirt that reached to their tops and a little double cape or dolman with a heavy chenille fringe.

On the subject of God Mr. Deverell was extremely well-informed, and nothing pleased him more than to answer the questions she asked betraying her childish interest in this exalted Being. His eloquence sometimes brought tears into his own eyes.

God, he often explained to her, was very like himself. He, too, was the father of a family, only God's family was of course very much bigger and included everybody who was really and truly a Christian. The sins and disobediences of His children made Him very sad and He was often obliged to punish them severely, but when they were good it made Him happy to reward them. Even if they had been bad, and sincerely repented, He forgave them and gathered them up to His beautiful home in the skies where they lived blissfully for ever and for ever.

"Then were you very bad, papa, when God sent you the jaundice?" asked little Laura. Harry had lately recovered from a severe attack of this depressing and lowering illness, and his temper was still uncertain. It was an unfortunate question.

"Now that shows," said he, at the same time irritated and pompous, "that you do not think. I said nothing about illness being sent as punishment. We are all subject to poor health from time to time. I was speaking of such things as extreme poverty, sudden and violent death and great disasters. Those things are sent as punishments. The people of Pompeii, for instance, were very wicked. I told you about Pompeii the other day, but I suppose you have forgotten."

"No, papa," said the chastened Laura. "I have not forgotten."

"It was very silly of you to ask such a question," Mr. Deverell went on. "You must learn to think before you speak. A nice little girl does not dream of asking her papa if he is bad. She knows he is not. She looks up to her father and loves him, and knows that what he does is right, just as she looks up to God and loves Him, and knows that what He does is right. Now do you understand?"

"Yes, papa." The little girl swallowed a lump in her throat and tried to keep back the tears. It was so good of her papa to take her out for walks, she was proud and happy to be so honoured, and now she had said a dreadful thing and made him angry. The elm trees swam before her eyes. She stumbled over a stone and would have fallen had he not jerked her sharply by the arm. His anger seemed cumulative and retrospective.

"It seems to me," he said harshly, "that the children of today have no idea of reverence, of respect. I would no more have dared to ask such a question of my father than

I would have dared to strike him in the face. We spoil our children, and this is the result. Your brother is no better. He is bad-tempered, self-willed and forward."

"Oh, papa, no!" cried Laura, cut to the heart at this criticism of her darling. "No, no, James is good. Truly, he is good."

"And now you contradict," her father complained, thoroughly exasperated. "I say James is bad-tempered. You say I am wrong. You have the temerity to put your opinion before mine. Really, this is too much. You will tell your mamma when you get in if you please, that you have been extremely naughty and ungrateful. This is the last time I will take you out until you are old enough to behave properly. When that will be it is impossible to say."

He turned toward home, walking with long strides and it was all Laura could do to keep up with him by running. She was crying now, but he paid no attention to her. Suddenly a masculine voice hailed them, and Harry turned to see his old friend Arthur Sutcliffe hurrying toward him. His face brightened, and his peevish expression vanished.

"Hello, Arthur old boy! It's years since we met. How goes the world with you?"

"I can't complain," said his friend, holding his hat at an angle above his head in deference to Laura. "There's . . . life in the old dog yet. How's yourself? And is this fine young lady your daughter?"

"Yes. My eldest child. I've had to give her a scolding. Dry your eyes, Laura, and shake hands with Mr. Sutcliffe."

Laura took a little handkerchief out of a pocket in the front of her dress, wiped her eyes and face, and then proffered her hand. She saw a bright-eyed, rakish, whiskered little man very sportily dressed and wearing a fascinating sprigged waistcoat. He wore his hat, which he replaced after shaking hands with her, very much on the side of a head of curly, iron-grey hair. His face, though youthful, even boyish, was wrinkled by hundreds of small fine lines, and he had a trick of jerking his eyebrows upward and winking that Laura found most interesting to watch. He also had an odd little habit of speech which was less a stammer than a hesitation before certain words.

"That's right, don't . . . cry any more. I dare say you didn't . . . deserve the scolding. Here's a nice new shilling to make up for it. What do you . . . say to that?"

Laura looked up at her father for permission, and was encouraged by his expression, which had completely changed.

"Take it, my dear, take it. Keep it as a souvenir. Giving away shillings to ladies for nothing is not this gentleman's way."

"Thank you very much," said Laura gravely, and pocketed the shilling. The two men laughed and looked at each other with roguish understanding.

"You're . . . just the feller I wanted to see," said Mr. Sutcliffe, taking his friend by the elbow. "Doing anything . . . tomorrow night?"

Cautiously, Mr. Deverell asked why.

"Some of the boys of the old brigade have taken windows for the . . . ceremony. You know what I mean." Furious winks. "We wanted you to come, but you're such a . . . family man these days there's no counting on you." He added, "Better come, all the same. There won't be many more of 'em, you know."

Harry shook his head.

"No thankee—not for Joe," he replied, in the slang of the moment. "I've given up going to see—ahem!—those affairs. As you say, there won't be many more, but—no, I think not."

"We're meeting at the old place at ten o'clock," Mr. Sutcliffe continued, persuasively. "Then we go to the . . . rooms with a couple of servants and a collation, and make a night of it. There'll be a . . . big crowd. Bigger than ever. They're moving heaven and earth to stop 'em. So this may be the . . . last."

"Quite right, too," said Harry, glancing a little uneasily at Laura. "Quite right, too, I dare say. Laura, you may walk as far as the gate alone. Trot off, like a good girl. Stop at the gate until I beckon."

She went, surprised at the change in her father. Her crime seemed forgotten. She stood by the gate and watched the leisurely crowd, the men elongated by tight narrow coats and tall silk hats, the women made enormous by their wraps and billowing skirts. She happened to be standing beside a be-shawled old woman who sat under a huge umbrella and sold oranges. She was talking to a ragged boy whose toes protruded through his boots.

"Aye, and get yer eyes blacked and the coat torn off yer," the old dame was saying to him. "You keep out of it, me lad. Let the gentry go if they've a fancy, and get their crowns smashed in. Wot sport there is in watching a man hanged is more nor I can see."

The words "a man hanged" frightened Laura, for she had once seen in some book of pictures a man swaying from a gibbet in chains with evil birds circling round him, and it had haunted her for many nights. But she was much too young to guess that there was any connection between the old woman's words and what her father and his friend were talking about. She looked longingly toward her father, hoping to see his beckoning finger.

He presently did summon her to his side once more, and the three, instead of going home, turned and walked in the direction of the great round concert building known as the Albert Hall, which was recently finished and which Laura understood was the most beautiful building in the world. Nine years later the Albert Memorial was piously erected, like a golden canopy over a Catholic Virgin. By the time they were ready to go home, Laura was very tired, for so deep were the two men in talk that they took no notice of her short legs and lagging steps. At times Mr. Sutcliffe would throw her a word or a wink, and once he took her by the arm and pointing in the direction of a dark, foreign-looking gentleman walking with a lady, said, "See, there goes the Prime Minister." It was her first glimpse of Mr. Disraeli, whom her father took great pleasure in hating.

She didn't see Mr. Sutcliffe again for two years, and once more it happened when she was walking with her father in the Park.

That day Harry was too much upset about the war between France and Germany to wish to talk to Mr. Sutcliffe about the Alhambra Theatre, where there were rival demonstrations nightly by French and Germans alike, with the band obligingly playing the patriotic airs of either country. Mr. Sutcliffe objected to this. He thought it a poor use to which to put the theatre, and there was no profit in it. He himself had invested a good deal of money in the Alhambra, and he wanted to see the theatre used for dancing. He told Harry that the authorities had refused a dancing license on the grounds that it led to immorality, and he was spluttering with indignation. It looked as though they might have to shut the place up.

"Damned hypocrites!" he fumed. Harry told him very sharply not to swear before his young daughter, whereupon

Mr. Sutcliffe apologized profusely, and gave Laura half a crown.

Harry was at this time already very set in his ideas and opposed to any sort of change. Innovation of any kind appeared to him a direct assault upon the security of his position as head of a family. Anything that he had not already thought about and got accustomed to, was—must be—bad and dangerous. And the idea of two great nations at war at England's very doors seemed to him an innovation of a most undesirable kind.

Mr. Sutcliffe's feelings about it were even more personal.

"Fancy Paris shut up. Shan't be able to go to the . . . Continent this year. Very annoyin', ain't it?"

Harry Deverell said that on his part he couldn't see what anyone wanted to leave England for, and that if he ever did think of taking his family abroad, Paris would be the last place he would dream of visiting. The French were a nation of gamblers and perjurers and worse. They had clearly brought this trouble on themselves, and England was quite right to keep out of it all.

> *"Let 'em alone, let 'em alone,*
> *When they fall out we shall come by our own,"*

he quoted sententiously.

Laura, however, felt romantically drawn toward Napoleon the Third, chiefly on account of the pictures she had seen of him and of his lovely Empress, a feeling shared by a great many of her sex. Twice a week, Rosa had some of her friends come to the house to help her make Red Cross bandages and Laura was usually allowed to assist, a thing she greatly enjoyed. The ladies talked a good deal about the Emperor, and about the Empress and her beauty and her lovely clothes. None of them cared for Bismarck, that man of blood and iron.

"What are the Prussians going to do with Versailles?" Laura presently asked.

"Hello! This young lady reads the . . . papers, does she?" Arthur Sutcliffe asked, winking at her.

"My wife and I discuss current events with the children every Saturday afternoon," Harry explained. "Tell Mr. Sutcliffe what you know about the war, Laura."

Laura coloured, for unlike her younger sister Violet, she was not at all fond of showing off, but she began bravely:

"Papa says that Napoleon the Third is war-like and badly behaved, and that the Prussians could put up with him no longer. Prince Bismarck did not want to go to war but was forced to, and now the Prussians will soon be in Paris. We must not mind our country being abused for keeping out of the war, because she is quite right to do so, but we must do what we can to help the poor soldiers of both countries."

"Bravo, bravo!" exclaimed Mr. Sutcliffe. "Well taught as a little parrot, ain't she?"

"All the same," Laura added, in a different voice, "if I were a soldier I would go and fight on the side of the French."

Mr. Sutcliffe pressed her to say why, but she shook her head and would make no answer.

"Where the sanctity of the home is no longer of importance," Harry Deverell said oracularly, "decay creeps in, and undermines the whole fabric of the state. France is already beginning to rot, like Ancient Rome. It should be a lesson to us all."

Mr. Sutcliffe winked at Laura, who replied with a shy little smile.

CHAPTER II

James was a delicate boy, and it seemed at one time possible—and oh, how terrible a possibility!—that he might not live beyond his seventh birthday. The doctor was rarely called in to see Laura or Violet, but always to see James, and this delicacy of his was to Laura, who adored him, like an open wound. He was pale, with admirable features, thick dark hair, and fine eyes. His little body was very thin, and his bones seemed brittle. He was of a quiet, serious, reticent turn of mind, and such was his extraordinary reserve that he never complained of feeling ill, and was sometimes discovered to have a high temperature only by the hot dryness of his hands and the burning heat of his forehead.

The little girls, on the other hand, hardly gave their parents a day's worry. Laura was fast turning into an ideal elder sister. She took great care of Violet and loved to spend hours reading to James, or helping him with his lessons. Their schoolroom—once their nursery—was on the top floor of the house, overlooking the square, and was of no great size, most of the space on that floor being taken up by the servants, for children were not given the best rooms in those days.

Harry soon realized that he was destined to be bitterly disappointed in his son James. He had wanted a son who would go into the army or at least the church, and the boy's ill health made any sort of a career extremely unlikely. If they were able to rear the boy at all, the doctor said, they would be fortunate, and the bills he sent in made the young couple groan. A good deal of the time there was a stout, middle-aged nurse in the house who dressed in black and either made boisterous fun with the children in a way they did not much like, or alarmed them with tales of death and layings out. So what with the nurse, Mr. John the tutor and Miss Mossbanks, the governess, Rosa and Harry never saw each other alone except at night. Gradually, domestic worries and responsibilities became their daily food, and they took a kind of pride in them. It gave Harry a feeling of importance to realize that he was the father of a very expensive and exacting family, and so great was the pressure of domestic life upon him that he entirely succumbed to its demands. He and Rosa thought of nothing, now, but their children. They went out hardly at all, and had few friends. Rosa never questioned but that it was to this destined end that she had dressed her hair with flowers and curls for those first balls and learnt such a sprightly flow of conversation.

"Modern women seem to be going mad," she sometimes complained. "One might think they had been born for nothing else but to dance the mazurka."

Gradually she and Harry became not two people but one. They walked in the Park side by side. Side by side they went solemnly to church. As far as possible they emulated the perfect married life of the Queen and the late Prince Consort—so little appreciated by the British public, poor man, till after he was dead. Together they took rooms at Southend in the summer for the children and themselves. Together they watched their offspring fishing from the end of the pier. Together they read, when they read at all, books of the most uplifting nature. Together they watched over the pledges of their love and tried to mould their young minds into exact replicas of their own. On Sunday mornings, each provided with a prayer-book, the little family would emerge from the wide front door of the house —Mr. and Mrs. Deverell in front and Laura, holding a hand of each of the younger children, behind—and join the stream converging toward St. Mary Abbott's, whose bells tolled loudly, filling the air with a clashing and pealing that sounded sweet in Rosa's ears.

The Deverells' friends were not very many. There was Florrie Peddler, a gay, laughing, frivolous little woman who had an invalid husband, and who chattered and exclaimed and giggled and fluttered as if it were her purpose to deny the sadder, darker side of her life entirely. She was always the first to proclaim the latest fad, the last whim of fashion. Her skirts were more ruffled and elaborate, her jackets tighter, her waist smaller, her sleeves more surprising than anyone else's, and she once wore a bonnet trimmed with real butterflies, and again, one trimmed with imitation raisins. Her shrill laugh, and high, excited voice made a great impression on Violet, who tried to imitate her, but strangely enough it was Laura she liked best, and she always made a little joke about adopting her in the event of her parents' sudden death.

There was also the Reverend Charles Dowdie who had been reluctantly obliged to retire, through losing his voice, from a very good living in Chelsea. He was well off, had a fine carriage and pair, and a handsome wife who was the daughter of a Bishop and looked like one of Mr. Du Maurier's drawings.

Mr. Dowdie's loud, hoarse whisper lent a kind of oracular significance to everything he said and greatly fascinated the children. He, like Harry, hated everything foreign or even semi-foreign, and wrote furious letters to the papers about Disraeli, saying that England was under the heel of the foreign Jew. When the foreign Jew presented Queen Victoria with the crown of India both he and Harry sniffed round it as dogs might sniff round a box with a rat in it. He, like Harry again, took the side of Prussia in the war, feeling that God was far more likely to be on the side of the Germans who seemed to be winning than on the side of the French who seemed to be losing. His wife, under a cloak of extreme humility, disagreed with almost everything he said.

"It's quite true, dearest Charles, that I know nothing, and it's absurd for me to differ from you, but I cannot help saying what I think, unimportant though it may be. And I think you are quite wrong about the war. The Prussians are far more culpable than you imagine, and the French far less to blame. It's an undisputed fact that the Prussians began planning for this war years ago. A man with a remarkable mind like yours very often does not trouble to inform himself about things that do not directly concern him, and sometimes a mere silly woman like myself may form more accurate judgments."

Harry found her a bore and feared she was bad for Rosa, but he liked talking to the Reverend Charles, who agreed with him in nearly everything, so the couple were often at the house.

One fine summer evening when Laura had been allowed to stay up later than usual, the Reverend Charles suddenly took her by the hand and led her out to the railings of the Square where they could obtain an uninterrupted view of what he invariably called the "heavens," and of the stars that burned so handsomely in them that evening.

He asked her what she knew of the constellations.

"Not very much, sir," Laura said. "I know the Pleides and Orion, and the Great and Little Bears, and I can find the Pole star and I know Cassiopeia's Chair . . ."

"Well done, my child," he said, as she paused. "How old are you? Nearly nine? Not many young females take so much interest in the stars." He pointed with his stick at a wide track across the skies that seemed sprinkled with pearl dust. "And what is that? That vast white path across the heavens?"

"That? Oh, that is the Galaxy, or Milky Way. Miss Mossbanks taught me that when I was seven."

"The Galaxy," said Mr. Dowdie in his terrible whisper. "A finer name than the Milky Way, in my opinion. And a galaxy it is indeed. Now tell me, why are all those stars placed there? What purpose do they serve?"

Laura said she didn't know. She guessed that as he had brought her out to tell her, he would not be displeased by her ignorance.

"Their purpose is to make us think of our Lord God, who placed them there. Remember that, and never forget it. All that beauty He gave us, with a bountiful hand. The sun by day, the moon and stars by night, in remembrance of Him. I never look up at the heavens without thinking of His goodness."

"Before I go to bed," said Laura, in her clear, childish voice, "I often look out to see if the stars are shining, and to see if I can find Orion. I like Orion best, after the Galaxy. I love the Galaxy. I wish I could count the stars in it."

"And do you thank Him for having placed them there for you?"

"I don't always remember to do that. I just think how beautiful they are."

"That is not enough. That is not nearly enough. The

Pagans could perceive beauty." There was something very frightening about his hoarse whisper. "And let me tell you this. There are people living in the world today who will say to you that our earth is only a star like the others. You will know them to be liars and Anti-Christs. God made this earth the centre of all things, and sent down to it His only begotten Son, to save us from sin, and round it move, for our joy and wonder and as a proof of His love, the sun and moon and all those myriad stars. Wonderful! Wonderful!"

Laura wished, a little nervously, that she were looking at them alone, or with James. They were indeed very beautiful, and Orion, out of which she could easily construct the hunter with his upraised bow, was more splendid than she had ever seen it. But the Reverend Charles remained there, lost in reverent contemplation, until the brisk clatter of horses' hoofs and the light rolling of wheels diverted his thoughts.

"The carriage," he said. "It is time for us to go. Remember what I have said." More to himself than to her he whispered, "There is a burning lake awaiting those who say it is not so." As they crossed the Square to the house, he asked her, "Have you heard of Darwin, my child?"

"Yes, sir," said Laura, relieved that this embarrassing tête-à-tête was almost over. "But I don't know anything about him. Papa will not speak of him before us."

"Let Darwin beware the burning lake," said Mr. Dowdie. "This voice was lost, preaching against his infamies. Had I another voice to give I would gladly give it too."

There had been something very solemn and significant about this little episode, and Laura remembered it for years. It was partly due to the still summer night, and to the fact that she had been allowed up much later than usual, and partly to Mr. Dowdie's fearful and impressive whisper. Mr. Dowdie, she supposed, must know what he was talking about. She had heard rumours—Miss Mossbanks had mentioned them with diffidence—that the earth was only one of a million other stars which might well be worlds like our own. She had just heard it emphatically and indignantly denied, however, by someone who, she supposed, must know.

Another frequent visitor to the house was a young lady named Dorothy Wimpole. She was some eight years younger than Rosa, but they had met at a party and taken a great fancy to one another. Miss Wimpole was the daughter of a fashionable surgeon, and her papa and mamma—it was very sad—did not agree very well. Mr. Wimpole's patients were chiefly ladies, and it often came about that they preferred his society to that of their husbands. One day there was a terrible scandal. Mr. Wimpole was set upon and thrashed by an angry spouse, and Mrs. Wimpole and Dorothy left his roof for ever and went to the house of Mrs. Wimpole's mother. The thing was a nine days' wonder, and Dorothy could not venture out for her embarrassment, mortification and shame. At last, however, she summoned up courage to take a closed brougham and drive to her friend's house. This was about four on a Sunday afternoon, and Harry's temper, after a heavy midday meal, was not at its best. She was observed through the curtains, alighting from the carriage, and by the time she was admitted, Rosa was nowhere to be seen. She was shown into the small morning-room, where Harry was sitting alone. The girl's eyes were red with crying, and her face was pale.

"I came to see Rosa," she explained, diffidently. "I'm afraid I am disturbing you. Rosa wrote me such a kind letter, and asked me—"

Harry interrupted her.

"My wife, unfortunately, is indisposed," he said, placing a chair for her, "and can see no one. Pray sit down, Miss Wimpole. I cannot but admire the courage you display in venturing out while the sad catastrophe that has fallen on you is still fresh in people's minds."

"Oh, I couldn't stay in any longer," said the girl. "What with mamma's tears, and grandmamma's and my own, I felt too disconsolate, I assure you. And Rosa said—"

"Miss Wimpole," Harry said, jerking his waistcoat down, "I am in a somewhat delicate position. My sympathies, believe me, are entirely enlisted on your side, and as a man who holds very precious indeed the sanctity of the home and family life, I feel very deeply for you. But I am myself a family man, you understand. I have little ones under my care, and I am the arbiter of the destiny of my dear wife, whose name I am in duty bound to protect. I cannot *choose* her friends, but I can influence her choice—"

"Oh!" broke out Miss Wimpole, her small bosom under its tight bodice rising and falling rapidly, "you are trying to tell me that I must not come here any more. That I must not see Rosa. That I am no longer—" She burst into tears, and hid her face in her hands. Mr. Deverell touched her lightly on the arm.

"My dear Miss Wimpole . . . please! Your father should have considered the effect on you before he so far forgot himself and his duty, to say nothing of his professional honour."

"But he did not," cried the girl, "and now I . . . I . . ."

"Miss Wimpole," said Harry earnestly, "control yourself, and hear what I have to say. I know your trouble is a heavy one, and believe me, I feel for you, but you should realize that the pain you have been called upon to bear you must bear with the help of your God, alone. You must see to it that you in your turn do not cause others pain, or do them harm, however unintentionally. Remember there is always One who will comfort and console."

The girl turned aside to wipe the tears from her eyes and blow her nose. She struggled to control her sobs.

"I did not come for heavenly comfort, but for human comfort, the comfort of a friend. If I can no longer have that I will go. But tell Rosa . . . tell Rosa I expected better of her than this. I will never again trust . . ."

She could say no more. She turned and went swiftly out of the room, showing him her slim, indignant back and the great mass of braided hair under her bonnet. Her skirts billowed out as she swept through the door. "Good-bye. Please don't trouble to see me out."

She opened the front door herself and shut it behind her smartly. He watched her cross the paved walk between house and gate and get into the brougham. Then he returned to the library. He was uneasy, and not altogether satisfied with himself; but after all, the girl's father had been thrashed in public, the scandal was of a most flagrant, unsavoury kind; one cannot touch pitch . . . no, no, he had done his duty, an unpleasant one, but his duty. He stooped to pick up something white that had fallen on the floor, and found it was a small, wet handkerchief. He tossed it into the fire. There was a rustle at the door and Rosa came in.

"Has Dorothy gone?"

"Yes."

"What did you say to her?"

"My dear, I thought we agreed to leave all this to me. I said, as kindly as I could, what I had to say. Let us not discuss the subject further."

"I saw you throw a handkerchief into the fire. Had she been crying?"

"She had, yes. She seems to be like her father in that respect. Lacking in self-control."

Rosa sat down. Her large blue eyes filled with tears.

"Oh, poor Dorothy! I wish you had let me see her. I think you must have been harsh . . . unkind. I ought never to have allowed . . ."

"Let us have no more of these tears," almost shouted Harry. "First the girl comes and weeps like a fountain, then you. Am *I* to blame? Have *I* been misconducting myself? Why should I be subjected to this?"

"You were harsh to her."

"I was NOT harsh!"

"You were. You must have been. Oh, I wish . . ."

There followed a stormy scene. They had seldom quarrelled, hardly at all of late years, and this was almost the last time Rosa ever opposed her views and wishes to Harry's. From that time her subjugation to him was as complete as his subjugation to her and their joint subjugation to what they conceived to be the good of the family—the family, not as a group of units which varied one from another but the family as something solid and whole and indivisible. Dorothy's name was never mentioned. A year later she married a young man who had just been called to the Bar and who in the course of time became a learned judge. She sometimes passed Rosa in Bond Street or Regent Street, but they never spoke.

None of this, of course, reached Laura's ears, and when she asked, as she did on one occasion, why they never saw "Aunt" Dorothy any more she was sharply told not to ask questions. Only the most improving things were mentioned in the children's presence.

Rosa had never liked Arthur Sutcliffe, so he was not asked to the house. Not even after his father died and he became Lord Doxendale would she tolerate his presence. The raffish little man disgusted her, with his winks and his hints and his talk of "Sweet Nellie This," and "Sweet Fanny That," and she knew very well that although he was now married to quite a nice woman, he kept a young person from the Alhambra in a tiny house by the river and bought her a brougham and pair to drive about with. It was Florrie Peddler, who dearly loved a bit of gossip, from whom she learnt this. She and Harry never discussed such things. As for Harry himself, he came to wonder what he could possibly have seen in the little man, so rapidly was he forgetting his own youth. His life was now one of astonishing rectitude and regularity. He conducted lengthy family prayers. He talked endlessly to the children about God and their souls, and the fact that he had once been a wild young man, a *noceur*, had played chemin-de-fer recklessly at the Arlington, and been in the habit of making a riotous holiday of public hangings, completely faded from his mind.

Laura, unlike Violet who looked like a Christmas Supplement child, gave at this time little promise of beauty. Her hair was of a quite unremarkable brown, her skin dark, her face pale and serious, and her eyes, though blue and set well apart, inconspicuous. She was growing fast and inclined to be lazy about taking walks, though Miss Mossbanks was so attached to her that she never complained of this. She loved reading, was sensitive and thoughtful, and had the gentle dignity and conscientiousness of the elder sister. She wished very much to set a good example to the younger children, and because of this her own shortcomings seemed like crimes in her eyes. With strangers she was, at that time, very shy and awkward. When visitors came to dinner she and Violet were sometimes allowed to come down for dessert—at Violet's age, Laura would never have been allowed to do this—and it was always Violet who made friends and amused the company. The child had a fatally good memory and could recite verse with faultless accuracy and an almost unbelievable lack of intelligent understanding. She would recite in a clear infantile treble, pulling at her curls and gazing blankly about the room as she did so, while a fixed and inane smile adorned her pretty, empty little face. This accomplishment of hers delighted Rosa and Harry and their guests, and she had a great success. Miss Mossbanks chose her recitations with care, but sometimes Harry would insist on her learning something he was particularly fond of. He loved hearing her recite, in her rapid gabble, Hogg's Arabian Song, which went as follows:

"Meet me at even, my own true love,
Meet me at even, my honey, my dove,
When the moonbeams revealing,
The cool fountain stealing,
Away and away
Through flow'rets so gay
Singing its silver roundelay.

Love is the fountain of life and bliss,
Love is the valley of joyfulness;
A garden of roses
Where rapture reposes,—
A temple of light,
All heavenly bright;
O, virtuous love is the soul's delight."

Or Bayly's "The Neglected Child," the first verse of which was:

"I never was a favourite,—
My mother never smiled
On me with half the tenderness
That blessed her fairer child:
I've seen her kiss my sister's cheek,
While fondled on her knee;
I've turned away to hide my tears,—
There was no kiss for me."

At these dinner parties of Rosa's, Harry became quite genial, almost playful, and told stories, usually about Irishmen or Americans, at which the company would laugh heartily. He had a great success with the Irish stories, and it was only necessary for him to say "begorra" for the laugh to begin; any joke with "begorra" in it being considered funny at that time.

It was not until she was sixteen that Laura first discovered in herself—with grave misgivings—a wayward habit of criticism. She found herself criticizing her father, her mother, her father's opinions, her mother's taste, the way she and the other children were brought up. At the same time she found that James had a like turn of mind, and the fact that his ill health excluded him from most of the things enjoyed by other boys gave his criticisms a bitter, caustic turn. He almost hated Violet, and her affectations disgusted him. Violet, well aware that her charms were not appreciated in that quarter, avoided James and Laura (unless she could get Laura alone) and attached herself to her parents, whose darling she knew she was.

Each morning at nine, Mr. John, the tutor, arrived and gave James his lessons in the morning-room, as soon as the breakfast things were cleared away. On three days in the week Laura joined them, and for her, Latin verbs were for ever associated with the smell of bacon. Beside Latin they also studied history and English literature, though Harry did not think either of these at all important, and on the days when Laura did not come, James studied mathematics. At the same time Miss Mossbanks struggled with Violet in the schoolroom on the top floor. Violet's intentions were good, but her little mind seemed able to hold just so much and no more, and the only studies in which she showed either interest or aptitude were French (for which Miss Mossbanks herself had to rely on grammars and text-books) and botany, omitting the Latin names. On the other hand, the child could sew a seam better than Laura and showed some liking for water-colour painting, especially if she were allowed to copy.

Mr. John was a tall, thin, bearded man of sixty, who made people wonder how a man of his gifts came to be tutoring instead of drawing a respectable salary as a professor at one of the Universities. The reason for this was that Mr. John was one of those dangerous persons called by the timid and conventional-minded, Freethinkers, and this had completely spoilt his career. A certain amount of Freethinking was, even in those days, forgiven in the case of eminent scientists, but Mr. John was not a scientist and he refused to teach anything he did not believe. His appearance was so austere, so clerical, so beyond reproach that Harry never thought of asking him about his religious views and merely took them for granted, Mr. John having for many years tutored the sons of a famous Cabinet Minister. On learning that no teaching of a religious kind was expected of him (Mr. Deverell preferring to instruct his family on that subject himself) Mr. John felt that he could take over the tutoring of young James in Latin, history and mathematics with a clear conscience. Moreover, he had bills to pay and his living to make. He at once took a great liking to the boy, and perceived in him a quick, curious and restless mind. On all religious subjects he was scrupulously evasive, but eventually this very evasiveness aroused James's curiosity to such an extent that he gave the tutor no peace with his questions. At last Mr. John saw that he could do no harm and might do good, for the boy's mind was seething with perplexities and prejudices that he had not even dared to share with Laura, and one memorable day the truth came out.

Not long after, the three children were walking in the Park with Miss Mossbanks, Violet in front with the governess, Laura and James behind. James, after a lengthy silence, suddenly asked Laura if she would promise him something.

"Promise you what? Oughtn't I to know what it is before I promise? It might be something I couldn't do."

"I wouldn't ask you to do anything you couldn't do, silly. I just want you to promise to keep a secret if I tell you one. An important secret."

"Oh, very well. I can always keep secrets. I promise."

"It's something about Mr. John."

"What is it then?"

"I've found out that Mr. John is a Freethinker."

"How do you know?"

"He told me so himself."

Laura turned this over in her mind, not sure whether she ought to be shocked or not.

"I don't know exactly what a Freethinker is," she said finally.

"I knew you didn't."

"Well, tell me."

"Freethinkers"—James's voice was full of awe, though he tried to speak casually—"don't believe in any religion or belong to any church. They don't believe Christ was divine, or born of the Virgin Mary, and they don't believe in the same kind of God other people believe in. They only listen to the voice of reason."

"They don't believe in the miracles?"

"No. Nor in the Bible story of the Creation, or the Deluge."

"Well, who could believe in the Creation?"

"Plenty of people do. Papa and mamma do, and Mr. Dowdie. Most people do. But Freethinkers don't believe in anything much." He added, "Mr. John didn't want to tell me. I made him. I kept on asking questions, and he couldn't bear to tell me lies. I'm a Freethinker too, now, but you mustn't tell, because papa would send Mr. John away if he knew."

"Of course I won't tell," Laura said. "Besides, I'm not sure I'm not one myself."

"You?" James looked at her with a slight contempt. "How can you be? You didn't know what it meant till I told you."

"Well, I thought a Freethinker was something much worse. But now I *know* I'm one. It's partly because of Mr. Dowdie. I don't like him, or anything he says or believes. If to be a freethinker is to be the opposite of Mr. Dowdie, then I'm one. Besides," she added, with a little hesitation, "I've been reading Darwin's 'Origin of Species!' "

"You haven't!" James was astonished. "Where did you get it?"

"I found it on a second-hand book-stall in the Charing Cross Road. Miss Mossbanks was looking for some Latin translations and I saw the 'Origin of Species' and bought it while her back was turned. I hid it in my satchel. I suppose it was wrong of me. It cost four and sixpence, and now I shan't have any pocket money till next month."

"I don't believe you can understand it," said James, who was inclined to be jealous of Laura's by no means to be despised intelligence.

"Well, I can understand a good deal of it."

"Why didn't you tell me before?"

"I didn't think I ought to," she said.

"Oh, you are a muff! I'd like to know why not."

"You're younger than I am, and I know papa would be terribly angry if he knew. I'm supposed to set a good example to you children. But now that Mr. John—"

"Mr. John has talked to me a lot about Darwin," James said. "He thinks I have a very good brain, I know he does."

"Oh, James dear!" Laura was a little pained. "That sounds dreadfully conceited."

"I can't help it if it does. I know I'm clever. I learn very quickly. Why shouldn't I be proud of it? I can't ride or skate or play tennis or cricket. I'm too rickety."

Laura's face darkened and saddened. It hurt her sharply whenever she was forced to realize that he minded those things.

"There are plenty of other things for you to do, darling."

"I know that. I can tell you one thing. I'm going to be different from other people."

"I want to be, too," Laura admitted.

"You can't be. You're a girl."

"I can. I will be. There are lots of famous women.

Think of Miss Elizabeth Thompson, who painted 'The Roll Call.' She's still almost a girl. And there's Ellen Terry and Sarah Bernhardt and Ouida and Mrs. Oliphant, and Florence Nightingale . . ."

"Well, but they didn't live with papa and mamma," said James.

"No, but even so, can't I manage to be somebody?"

"I don't see how. And if you really do want to, you'd better begin soon. It seems to me you're exactly the same as every other girl now. You wear just the same silly clothes."

"That doesn't make me the same. Besides, what's wrong with my clothes?"

James looked critically at her.

"I think they're hideous. I hate those dresses that are all jerked up at the back, as if someone was trying to make you 'walk Spanish,' and I hate those things you wear over them that pretend to be pinafores, and aren't."

"Well, they're called pinafore dresses. It's the fashion."

"There you are. 'It's the fashion.' I think those puffs at the tops of your sleeves are silly too, and I think that hat is silly, with that silly little feather stuck up in the silly front of it."

"What would you like me to wear?"

"Oh, anything that has some common sense." But he was evidently tired of this subject, for he suddenly remarked, "Laura, I hate papa. Sometimes I almost hate mamma, but not quite."

Laura was horrified at this, and deeply concerned.

"James, you really mustn't say that. It's wicked."

"I can't help that. It's true. They don't like me and I don't like them."

"That isn't true at all. They love you very much. They love us all."

"They love *darling* little Violet, and they're fond of you, and they're disappointed in me. Don't you suppose I know? They wanted me to go into the army. Well, I'm glad I'm delicate, because I would have hated the army."

"Really, James, it's very wrong of you to talk like that. They do everything they possibly can for us. They're thinking of our good all the time."

"Our good! They don't even know what it is. Don't be a silly, Laura. They want us to be as much like them as possible, just to please their vanity. And I won't be like them. I won't. I'm not going to church any more. I'm never going again. I wish I hadn't been confirmed."

Laura heard this with alarm.

"James, darling, you know I don't much like going to church either, but I do think we ought to go, to please them, and to avoid a fuss. After all, one can always think what one likes."

"I'm not such a hypocrite as you are, then," returned James.

"But don't you see that it will only make papa angry and cause trouble? And in the end you'll have to go."

"Why will I? How can they make me go?"

"They'll find a way. And papa will be furious."

"I don't care. Let him be furious. I tell you they can't make me go, unless they choose to use force."

Laura's efforts to bring him to a more filial state of mind were entirely unavailing, and she began to dread the approach of Sunday. James, as the day drew near, said nothing about his intentions, and betrayed no excitement whatever, so that Laura was inclined to think he had forgotten, or changed his mind, and she took good care not to remind him by word or look.

At half past ten on Sunday morning, Rosa and the two girls were dressed and waiting in the morning-room, where it was the custom to assemble before starting for church. They were all three wearing the pinafore frocks that James so disliked, pulled upwards at the back into a kind of bustle, and buttoned tightly down the front from chin to waist. Rosa's was black, the two girls' dark brown, and they all wore little tippets of fur and carried small muffs. They surveyed each other with approval, Laura feeling very nervous and trying not to let the others see that anything was amiss.

Then Harry came down. He was looking very sallow and bad tempered, and at once rang for Grace the parlourmaid to complain that his silk hat had been put away unbrushed.

"Where's James?" he demanded. "Why isn't he ready? What does he mean by keeping everyone waiting?"

He strode to the foot of the stairs, the rest of the family following him into the hall, and called in a loud voice, "James! James! What are you doing? Come at once. It's time to go."

James suddenly appeared at the top of the stairs as though he had been waiting to be called. He still wore his everyday clothes and carried neither hat nor prayer-book, but had a large volume of some kind under his arm.

"Yes, papa? Did you want me?" he asked.

Harry stared up at him angrily.

"Why are you not ready for church? What do you mean by keeping us waiting like this? Why are you not properly dressed? Have you forgotten that this is Sunday?"

"No, papa, I hadn't forgotten that it was Sunday." As he spoke James slowly descended the stairs, pausing on each step.

"Hurry, dear," said Rosa briskly. "Run and get your hat and gloves. You needn't change your clothes. I suppose you had forgotten the time. Now hurry, and don't make your papa angry."

"I hadn't forgotten the time, either," said James. "I'm not coming to church, that's all." He added, simply stating a fact, "I'm going to stay at home and read."

"You are, are you?" shouted Harry, his face reddening angrily. "Well, allow me to inform you that you're going to do no such thing. Go up at once, sir, and do as your mamma says. How dare you behave like this?"

"I'm not coming," James said. "I hate church."

He made a move toward the morning-room, but as Harry blocked his way he sat down on the stairs. He was fourteen, and small for his years, and ill health had given him a look of frailty and fragility, so that Laura, looking at him and trembling, marvelled at the spirit that was in him.

"We are waiting for you," Harry informed him with ominous politeness.

"It's no good waiting, papa. I'm not coming."

"Will you obey me, sir, and go up and get ready at once?"

"No, papa."

Laura's heart was beating so fast and so violently that she could hardly stand. She feared to speak, thinking she would only precipitate a crisis. Violet stood staring, round-eyed and astonished. Rosa was very pink, and looked anxiously from her son to her husband.

"Do as your papa says, James, like a good boy. Go up now, and get ready. No more of this nonsense."

"Can't he stay at home today?" pleaded Laura. "I don't think he feels well enough to come to church. Please let him stay."

But James would not allow this to pass.

"I feel quite well. I'm just not coming to church. You know I hate it. I'm going to stay home and read."

He opened his book (which was Motley's "Rise and Fall of the Dutch Republic"), laid it upon his knees, and began to read, twisting a lock of hair with one hand as he always did when absorbed in anything. It was a most effective tableau, but it was not allowed to continue for more than five seconds, as Harry advanced swiftly upon him and seized him by the collar.

"You will come up and get your hat and gloves and then you will come to church. You others go. I will attend to this boy." He jerked James to his feet and the book fell heavily to the floor.

"Come, children," said Rosa sharply. She looked a little frightened, but it did not occur to her to interfere. She went to the front door, turning her back upon the scene. Laura was frantic with anxiety.

"Oh, mamma, can't I wait? What will papa do to James?"

"That is none of your business. Your papa will do as he thinks best without advice from you. Now come!"

Laura looked up the stairs and saw her father dragging James from step to step by one arm.

"Papa, you'll make James ill!" she cried, sick with alarm.

Rosa seized her by the shoulder, pushed her through the door and shut it behind them. There was nothing to do now but stand on the doorstep or go to church, so Laura followed her mother.

"I declare," said Rosa, her face suffused with a high colour, "the only one of you children from whom your father and I get any obedience or satisfaction is Violet."

Violet walked primly at her side and tried not to appear self-conscious. Laura was silent for some time, then she burst out,

"I don't care, I think it's wrong to make James go to church if he doesn't want to. It can't possibly do him any good to be made to go. I don't think you or papa make any attempt to understand him. You just bully him."

Rosa flared up.

"Be quiet! I don't wish to hear another word. You are getting completely above yourself. How dare you speak so? I don't know what's come over you and James. It would do you both good to be sent away to boarding school for two years, and I've a good mind to see that you go."

Laura sat through the service with a heavy heart. She knew James would have to give in or take a beating, and she very much feared he would not give in, while a beating would almost certainly make him ill. She guessed that with her parents it was even less the principle involved than the loss of parental authority that concerned them. She kept turning her head to watch the door, but as they had not appeared by the time the lengthy sermon began she gave up hope, and tried to keep herself from imagining the disasters that might have befallen James. So much spirit and independence in such a frail little body. . . . She marvelled at it.

When they at last got back to the house they saw the doctor's carriage waiting at the door, and Rosa almost ran the last twenty yards. What Laura had feared, had happened. James had taken a beating and fainted, and Harry had been unable to bring him round. He sent one of the maids flying for the doctor, who was, it appeared, not a church-goer, for he came at once, and applied restoratives. At length James came to, but his pulse was alarmingly feeble and the doctor said he must stay in bed and have absolute rest and quiet for three days. As he came downstairs to put on his coat he said to Rosa in Laura's hearing.

"My advice to you, my dear lady, is to spare the rod and spoil the child. I have known boys who needed corporal punishment as they needed soap and water, but your son is not one of them. See that he takes his drops every hour and keep him absolutely quiet. And only a light diet, please. I will call again tomorrow."

Rosa was chagrined and somewhat frightened. Frightened at the doctor's words, and chagrined that Laura should have heard them. She and Harry had been roundly scolded by a comparative stranger for doing what they believed to be their duty. It was most upsetting, and it was all James's fault for being so stubborn and naughty. She didn't care much for this young doctor who had taken their old doctor's place. He had very odd ideas and at times was almost rude. She said nothing to Laura, however, in self-defence, for Laura was in disgrace, and neither her father nor mother addressed a single word to her for two whole days, a punishment which the sensitive Laura felt very deeply.

But when next Sunday came, Rosa and Harry and the two girls went to church, and James stayed at home and read "The Rise and Fall of the Dutch Republic." Laura believed in making compromises in order to keep the peace. She felt a little humble in James's presence after that. Such striking victories were not for her.

CHAPTER III

In 1879 Laura was nearly eighteen and James was sixteen and a half, for there was a difference of only fourteen months between them. At this time Laura played tennis a good deal and went "rinking" in the company of her great friend Amelia Bonner and Miss Mossbanks, as "rinking" was then all the fashion. Miss Mossbanks had almost succeeded in refining herself out of existence. She was so much the retiring gentlewoman that she sometimes seemed to Laura to have retired altogether from anything so vulgar as living, and to be merely a ladylike and fluttering ghost returned to earth because of an undying interest in the proprieties. She thought roller-skating dreadful, and the sight of Laura gliding about the rink with breast thrust forward and limbs outlined by the wind she herself made in her swift flight was most distasteful to her. Laura's figure was developing very fast now, and a pleasing one it promised to be. Miss Mossbanks would have liked all ladies to be quite flat, like herself—she believed her lack of curves to be due to her own modesty, and never dreamt that her modesty was due to her lack of curves—and she believed that a really nice woman was only discovered to be a female by her reverent and entirely unsuspecting spouse, who would treat this amazing revelation as something unutterably sacred. Laura, having no one to learn from but Miss Mossbanks, Amelia Bonner and the inquiring James, hovered between an attitude of mind not altogether unlike this, and one of great common sense, which was more natural to her. She knew Miss Mossbanks was silly, but her prudishness, nevertheless, had a certain effect upon her, though when she was playing tennis or roller-skating, or talking to people of her own age she was perfectly happy and natural. She was not allowed to skate with anyone but Amelia, Amelia's uncle, Bertie Young, and Amelia's brother Felix, when he was home during the holidays. She played tennis quite often at the Bonners' house in Melbury Road. It was a large house with an extensive garden, and a tennis court marked out—somewhat sketchily—on the lawn. In those days, when ladies merely added a tennis racket to their calling costumes and changed their shoes, it was a simple matter to step out and take a little exercise on the lawn after tea. The girls ran gently about the court with a great frou-frou of skirts, hitting at the ball and giving little cries of annoyance if they missed it or of pleasure if it went where they had most hoped it would go.

From all such pleasures James was completely cut off. His poor heart would not enable him to run or skate and he walked about like an elderly gentleman, his new tutor, Mr. Lamb, by his side. The truth about Mr. John's opinions had been concealed with great care from Rosa and Harry, but in spite of that they suspected him of being the source of James's Freethinking, and of having tainted their son's mind. Therefore he had to go, and James, who knew this was inevitable, prepared himself for the event, and at Mr. John's request, made neither fuss nor protest. The parting of the boy and the old man was touching, for their affection for each other was very great and James knew that an interchange of letters would never be allowed. They believed, then, that they were parting for ever, and each tried to outdo the other in stoicism. Harry chose the next tutor with far greater care, and certainly Mr. Lamb was orthodox enough to suit the most exacting. At first

James loathed him and would hardly open his mouth in his presence, but he soon discovered the joys of combat with a mind not much inferior in quality but different in kind from his own. Their walks became wordy battles, and Mr. Lamb was astounded and frequently chagrined by the boy's knowledge. Certainly neither James nor Mr. John had wasted their time while they were together and James had long passages from Voltaire and Rousseau, Darwin and Huxley by heart. He could quote Goethe and Schopenhauer most inconveniently and he used these great names to batter down his tutor's arguments. Immense impetus had been given to his inquiries and studies by his father's hostility, and it was only necessary for Harry to express an opinion or a wish for James to align himself immediately upon the other side. Whatever his father liked, he hated, whatever his father hated, he liked.

With Rosa, the boy got on better. He was fond of his mother, in spite of her approval of everything his father did or said. She was still pretty in a comfortable, buxom way, wore clothes that rustled and smelt pleasant, and had a natural delicacy of touch in the sick-room. When he had to stay in bed he liked her to come in to him with a fresh, agreeable noise of silk, touch his forehead with cool, plump hands, arrange his pillows, kiss him, and sit quietly by his side—she had finally learnt that he hated to be talked to. Laura was allowed to talk to him or read aloud if he were in the mood to be read to, but Violet wisely kept out of the way, knowing that James had no desire to see or hear her when he was ill. As for Harry, he had no liking for a *tête-à-tête* with his son at any time, and disliking illness, he kept away from the sick-room entirely.

Although he was constantly in disfavour—for Rosa and

Harry could neither forgive nor forget his hatred of orthodox religion—James nevertheless had a way of making himself a figure of importance in the household. There was a kind of dignity about his movements, his eyes were watchful and intelligent, and he thought before he spoke. Apart from his refusal to go to church or join in family prayers he was quite amenable, and, as long as his health was reasonably good, gave no one any trouble. He asked for almost no pocket money, and seemed content to go for outings to the museums or to the Botanical Gardens, or when it was fine, to the Park with a book. He had only one friend of his own age and that was Felix Bonner, Amelia's brother. Felix, though only seventeen, had a considerable knowledge of London life, thanks to his uncle Bertie Young. This gentleman, who was about thirty and well off, was the perfect uncle at home and was trusted with his niece and her girl friends in a way that was almost unflattering, but abroad he was known to a very different set, and to this set it amused him to introduce his young nephew. He took Felix to the Alhambra to see "Venise," "The Princess Trebizond," and "La Petite Mademoiselle," all harmless enough; but afterwards he took the boy behind the scenes and introduced him to the lovely Florence Bingham and Eustacia Lord, and Felix fell in love with both of them and would describe their charms to the extremely curious but slightly incredulous James, who enjoyed this indirect contact with the night life of London. He valued Felix because he could tell him of it, and in his friend's ingenuous recitals he somehow managed to arrive at a kind of truth about it all. Well, he would see. If he got stronger and his father let him have any money (which he considered unlikely) he would taste these things for himself. If not, he would be ready to cast upon them the cold water of his contempt and dislike; for what James could not have he found fundamental flaws in.

In the wall in James's bedroom was a little cupboard which would lock, and here he and Laura concealed such books as Rosa and Harry would have confiscated with shocked and fussy indignation if found. Laura's treasures were by no means all scientific works. She adored the forbidden Ouida; the unsanctified kisses of six-foot guardsmen were vicariously hers, as were the escapades of frail, lovely, and aristocratic heroines. James read them, too, but with an amused contempt. He knew that life was not like Ouida long before that disappointing truth dawned on Laura. But to rebel against parental authority was in itself a good thing in James's opinion, whether that rebellion led to Ouida or Darwin. Laura, whose desire for knowledge was only second to James's because she mistrusted her sex's capacity for learning, allowed him to lead her and marvelled at the wide range of his interests. Mr. John had sent him a volume of poetry called "Poems and Ballads" which mercifully escaped his parents' eyes. It was by a man named Swinburne, and James was fascinated by it. He read and re-read it, carried it in his pocket wherever he went, learnt most of the shorter poems by heart, and persuaded Laura to do the same. The fact that Mr. John still thought of him and took an interest in him gave him confidence and a great satisfaction, and he wrote to him from that time on, almost every week. He well knew how much he owed to his old tutor, who had dared to relegate Latin and Greek verse, considered, in those days, of paramount importance, to a place below such unorthodox studies as Continental history, the theory of evolution, English literature, and a study of the age-long struggle between religion and science; and who encouraged him to acquaint himself with the lives of his favourite great men: Plato, Bacon, Voltaire, Galileo, and the martyred Giordano Bruno. In politics the boy took no interest at all, and the everlasting controversies over Home Rule, Disestablishment, the position of Turkey in Europe, bored him unspeakably. Nor could he see anything romantic or stirring in the Afghan and Zulu wars, for he hated wars. Mr. John often distressed himself with doubts and fears as to the wisdom and rightness of his course while the boy was under his care, but he consoled himself with the thought that he had probably assisted at the birth of something very like genius. Moreover, he shared James's opinion of Mr. Deverell, and saw no good reason why a mind so puerile and conventionally silly should be allowed to influence a mind like his pupil's.

Mr. Lamb, to James's great delight and amusement, fell in love with Laura, and it was with a malicious pleasure that the boy watched him blush and stammer at each encounter with his sister. The young tutor hoped some day to go to a Theological College and read for Orders—he was only twenty—and he believed that celibacy was an aid both to purity of thought and ecclesiastical favour; but Laura's maturing charms, her gravity, and her shy, elusive eyes—she disliked Mr. Lamb and tried not to show it—completely overwhelmed him. Sweat would break out upon his forehead, and his hands would turn to ice. He failed even to utter the words "your sister" in her absence without a quiver in the voice, and all such symptoms James duly observed and reported. Laura ended by feeling sorry for him. It was hard to dislike anyone, she found, who saw so much to like in her, and this very human weakness remained with her through life.

She had her secret romances. She cried bitterly in her bed at night when the young Prince Imperial was killed in Zululand. She was at an age when she was ready to fall in love with any remote and romantic figure, and the young Prince's death, so far from home and from his beautiful and adoring mother, seemed to her overwhelmingly sad. She had just been with Amelia and Mrs. Bonner to a palmist—palmistry being just then all the rage, and known as "The New Science"—and the palmist had told her she would lose a lover in battle. When the Prince fell, she was easily able to persuade herself (for a time) that he and she had met in dreams, and that there really was some spiritual bond between them, and that had their lives been ordered differently they would have met and loved in the flesh.

It was altogether a sad year, the year 1879. It was a year of cheerless gloom, of terrible weather, of bad trade, of social unrest, of political reverses, of misfortunes to the fighting forces, and it ended fittingly in the horror of the Tay Bridge disaster. The Tay Bridge, regarded as the last and greatest triumph of engineering skill, fell, and there fell with it a train carrying nearly a hundred souls. Laura would read with shudders of the attempts of the divers and seamen to find the bodies of the unfortunates drowned so horribly.

"What's the good of saying God loves us, when He lets such things happen?" she asked James.

"What's the good of pretending that God has anything to do with it?" answered James. "Get rid of that idea, and it's all quite simple. The bridge was faulty, it was weakened by storms, a train passed over it, and it fell. There were people in the train, and naturally they were drowned. Why try to make a mystery about it?"

Rosa and Harry saw in it the hand of the Lord. He reminded us in such ways of His awful power. Were it not for these tragedies man might forget his Creator and think himself supreme.

"In the midst of life—" Harry quoted. "And it is well for each and all of us to remember, and to prepare."

He saw something much more alarming and upsetting, a little later, in the attempt to shoot the King of Spain as he drove through the gates of the Royal Palace in Madrid.

"The world seems to be going crazy," he then said. "It's all these horrible modern ideas."

The bad agricultural outlook in both England and Scotland, the near approach of famine in Ireland, these things left him unmoved until some of his securities declined in value owing to the general depression. The result was that having promised to take the whole family to the Lyceum on Boxing Day to see Henry Irving and Ellen Terry in "The Merchant of Venice," he announced, gloomily, that as things were so bad he thought it better not to spend any money unnecessarily at present.

Unheralded, a new epoch began when Harry read aloud from the *Times* one morning at the breakfast table, that Mr. Edison's carbon horseshoe electric lamps had continued successfully burning at Menlo Park for one whole night, and that the general public was beginning to regard the invention as established.

"Let them," said Harry. "Let them. There'll be no electrical lamps in any house of mine while I'm alive."

This was in January, 1880. At that time æsthetic culture had been a subject of drawing-room conversation for about two years, and Rosa finally got Harry's reluctant consent to allow her to change the reception rooms. Florrie Peddler had already changed hers, and in matters of fashion Rosa liked to be up to date, and to lag behind Florrie no more than she must. She wished to remove all the panelling, which was no longer modish, and to substitute the new, smart, patterned wall-papers that had recently, thanks to Mr. Morris, come into vogue. So the woodwork was done away with, and wall-papers chosen and put up. Rosa then began buying willow-pattern plates which she stood on little carved brackets, and she decorated the mantelpieces, which had heretofore borne only a dignified clock, with a piece of Turkish embroidery, numerous pieces of blue china, and some Japanese fans. Rubber plants and palms standing upon little bamboo tables invaded the rooms, and wicker chairs took the place of the mahogany ones. So badly did Rosa succumb to the bric-à-brac craze that Harry was obliged to call a halt with some sternness, lest it should be impossible to move without the sound of breaking china.

Together she and Harry bought oil paintings for the dining-room and hung them wherever there was space between the blue plates. An oil painting was an oil painting to them, and provided they liked the subject, and the subject was plainly enough represented, nothing more was asked of it. Florrie Peddler, the Dowdies, the Bonners and other friends pronounced the rooms "sweetly pretty," and "quite delicious," and everyone was satisfied except James and Laura who had liked them much better before.

The two had lately discovered Whistler, and were experiencing all the ardour of the recent convert. Laura's attention had first been directed to him by a young artist friend of the Bonners, whom the older people considered a little mad, but whom Laura, James, and Amelia found decidedly attractive. They were disposed to like Whistler on his recommendation, but soon grew to like him for quite other reasons. Also the abuse he received from the press prejudiced them in his favour, and the lofty scorn of Mr.

Punch infuriated them. They went with Rosa and Harry to the Grosvenor Gallery and squeezed each other's hands in an ecstasy of contempt when their elders laughed heartily and fatuously at the "Symphonies in Colour." (Symphonies in colour, forsooth! What a silly idea!)

"It's no use. Papa won't look at a picture unless it's just pretty," said Laura. "And mamma only likes pictures that tell a story, and a happy story at that."

"Come away," said James. "Don't listen to them. They'll only make you ill."

In spite of the fact that Harry talked poverty a good deal, he and Rosa decided to have Violet's portrait painted by an artist whose work they admired in the Royal Academy exhibitions, so painted she was in a white, frilly dress with pink bows, seated at a piano (she never learnt to play) and smiling archly over her shoulder.

Laura did play the piano, but she had small talent and knew it. Besides which she was too nervous to play in company, and it made her miserable to think that so much money was being wasted on her. For some time she had been going twice a week to the famous Madame Frickenhaus for lessons, but when she was expected to play a Chopin Etude at a pupils' recital she broke down and burst into tears, and this for ever ended Rosa's efforts to make a pianist of her. The only really musical one of the family was James, but so strong was his parents' desire to punish him for his ungodliness that they said he could only take lessons if he would go regularly to church. This attempt at bargaining disgusted James, and although he longed to learn he would have nothing to do with such a treaty. He amused himself instead by trying to improvise on the schoolroom piano, and passed hours in this way. Presently with the aid of a book he began to teach himself harmony, and when he was in funds, which was seldom, he went to concerts. He loved Mozart, who was considered by the intellectuals of the time to be too "tuney," and Wagner, although his music exhausted him and made his head ache. Bach he didn't discover till a little later, after he heard the St. Matthew Passion music at St. Paul's Cathedral, and came home in a kind of trance.

Laura begged her father to let him have lessons, but in vain.

"James does nothing to please us," said Harry, "and I see no reason why we should satisfy his every whim. Had his health been better I would have treated him with far greater severity. I am obliged to be more indulgent than I think is right because he is delicate. So he may think himself lucky."

Although Laura was soon to come out, Rosa and Harry did very little toward preparing for the event. They believed a good deal in Providence. Providence, combined with ladylike manners and a nice upbringing, would provide Laura with a suitable husband all in good time. Meanwhile she was quite useful at home and was the only member of the family who had any influence over James. They had made such a fetish of family life that their circle of friends had dwindled to a mere half dozen, and none of these, with the exception of the generous and kindly Bonners, could be of much use to Laura. Florrie Peddler, enthusiastic friend that she was, went out little herself and knew few young people, but she intended, nevertheless, to give Laura an evening party of some kind. Mrs. Bonner was taking her as well as Amelia to several balls, and Rosa herself planned a coming-out dance in Kensington Square which would be small, of course, but it was the best she could do. These were all the festivities Laura had to look forward to until one day Rosa received a letter from her Aunt Susan Merton-Stuart, whom she had not seen for over two years. She wrote that she was bringing out a niece of her husband's who was about the same age as Rosa's Laura, and she hoped the two girls might see something of each other. She invited them to tea that same week, and said that she would send invitations for her dance in April. This threw Laura into a state of great excitement. It seemed to open up a new world, just at the moment when she was finding the old one a little stale and confined.

"Oh, mamma, do you think they will like me?" she asked, anxiously. Rosa was not particularly hopeful.

"My Aunt Susan is inclined to think of herself as a great lady," she said. "Of course her eldest daughter did marry Lord Volens, but even so I see no reason why they should give themselves the airs they do. This niece may be quite a vulgar little thing for all I know, and not a suitable friend for you at all. I am not well acquainted with my uncle's family. Still, I dare say the dance will be a fine affair. We must go to Peter Robinson's and find you a dress."

They went to tea in Green Street, Mayfair, and Laura was at once rather fascinated by her distant cousin, Olga Merton-Stuart. She was a pretty, dark girl who looked as though she had Jewish blood in her, for her nose was aquiline and un-English, and her eyes large and black. The two girls whispered together about their mutual fondness for Ouida, while Rosa and Lady Merton-Stuart—her husband had recently been knighted—talked in a stately fashion about servants and housekeeping, and the difficulty of finding suitable lodgings by the sea for the summer holidays. Lady Merton-Stuart said that really Ostend was the only place to go, though personally, if she had not her grandchildren to consider, she would always prefer to go to Royat and take the cure. She looked critically at Laura and told Rosa that her girl was quite good-looking and seemed animated. Animation appeared to be everything nowadays. Vivacious girls always married easily. Had she any accomplishments? Rosa said that she played a little, but not in public, and that she was a great reader. This a trifle apologetically.

"Not a blue-stocking, I hope?"

"Oh, dear no," said Rosa. "Thank heaven, she's not that."

"You must get her married young," said Aunt Susan. "That cures them of being blue-stockings. My girl Helen always had her nose in a book until she married, and now she never opens one."

Meanwhile Laura and Olga talked in their corner about the books they liked—Mrs. Braddon's new book for instance, "Barbara or Splendid Misery"; "Her Gilded Cage" and "The Greatest Heiress in England," by Mrs. Oliphant. Laura admitted that she had been reading King Cetawayo's book about his nation and about the origin of the war. Olga made a grimace and said, "How dull!" so that Laura felt a little ashamed of having mentioned it. Olga presently asked her aunt if she might take Laura upstairs, and obtaining the desired consent she conducted her up to her bedroom and showed her more dresses than she had ever seen in her life before.

"I'm going to wear this at the ball," she said, "now see that you don't copy it." Laura gazed upon a marvellous frock of looped and draped and ruffled yellow silk, caught up here and there with rosebuds and lace; a dress to make a débutante swoon with joy.

"Copy it!" exclaimed Laura, who took this warning in the spirit in which it was meant, "you needn't be afraid of that. I'm wearing a plain blue silk from Peter Robinson's. I should think this must have come from Paris."

"All my frocks come from Paris," said this astonishing girl, shutting the wardrobe door. "I'm an heiress, you see. Papa was Uncle Robert's brother and much richer than Uncle Robert. When he died I came into all his money, but I shan't be able to spend much until I'm twenty-one. Then watch me! What's your dress allowance?"

Laura coloured as she answered;

"Twenty pounds a year."

Olga stared, her full, red lips apart.

"But no one can dress on that."

"I do. Except my shoes, which mamma buys for me, and now and then a hat. I buy the stuffs, you see, and a cheap little dressmaker makes them up."

"How awful!" said Olga. She was rummaging in a drawer, searching for something. "Look, here's a photograph of my young man. He's in the Seventeenth. Isn't he delicious?"

She showed Laura a photograph of a fair young man with lips as full and curved as her own, a small moustache, and a sulky expression. He was dressed in uniform.

"Are you engaged, then?" Laura asked.

"Oh, heavens no! Not officially, that is. But we're madly in love and we're going to marry as soon as I get my money. Oh, my dear, when he kisses me, I promise you, I simply swoon with bliss. We have a conservatory here that is quite perfect for kissing in, and sometimes I've been alone with him for nearly five whole minutes. We don't waste time, as you can imagine. Are you in love with anyone?"

"Oh, no," said Laura, a little startled. "I don't know anyone to be in love with. I only know Felix Bonner, my best friend's brother, and her uncle, Bertie Young, who's too old, and one or two others. No one that matters."

"I'll see what I can do for you, then," said Olga with a little giggle. "Fancy not being in love! I've been in love with Cecil since I was sixteen. I should simply die if I weren't in love. He's just bought me a St. Bernard dog, the most enormous thing you ever saw. I haven't told Aunt Susan yet, I'm so afraid she won't let me keep him—the dog, I mean. St. Bernards are all the rage now, you know. Won't I look sweet walking out with my beautiful monster?"

"How lovely!" was all Laura could find to say. She was in a completely strange world and had lost her bearings in it. Should she admire and envy this young girl, with her vitality, vanity and self-confidence, or rather despise her? Was she charming and natural, or rather silly? Did she want to be like her, or was she glad she was not? She hardly knew. But she did know that she was glad they had met. Olga represented something new and very feminine of which Laura felt she knew too little as yet. Like James, she was willing, at this time, to learn of life vicariously.

Olga found in Laura a confidante, and, she believed, a pupil. It gave her a feeling of great sophistication to talk to her about herself and her love affair, and to instruct her in the ways of the world.

"I'll make her prefer me to that stupid Amelia Bonner she talks so much about," thought Olga, who was at an age when female conquests are nearly as important and flattering to the vanity as male. So she proceeded to show a lively interest in her distant cousin, and Laura was often at the house in Green Street. Together she and Olga were taken by Lady Merton-Stuart to the Opening of Parliament, together they went to sewing parties and charitable bazaars in aid of the Irish Distress League, together the girls took French lessons from a tri-weekly Mademoiselle, and lessons in the mazurka and the waltz from a Miss Poindexter in Albemarle Street. Amelia Bonner, hearing of these things, wept jealous tears.

"You don't care for me any more; you're completely engrossed by that vulgar heiress. I think it's too cruel of you to be so fickle and heartless, and after all my devotion to you," she sobbed.

Laura denied that her love had suffered any diminishment. Amelia and all the Bonners would always be her friends.

"But not your *best* friends any longer!"

"But Amelia, dear, these are my relations."

She was devoted to the plump, fair, over-affectionate Amelia, but she could not be in two places at once, and she was a great deal at the Merton-Stuarts. Rosa and Harry were well pleased that their daughter had found favour in that quarter, and Harry increased her dress allowance temporarily, to thirty pounds. James, however, looked upon this new friendship without enthusiasm. He was always inclined to like the well-to-do a good deal less than those with small incomes, or none at all, and thought Olga superficial and rather silly. Laura imagined that Olga might fall romantically in love with James, whose good looks were now very noticeable, and he with her, but instead of that James seemed to take pleasure in antagonizing the heiress, and her luscious prettiness pleased him not at all.

The Deverells did not own a carriage, but were in the habit of hiring a brougham whenever it was needed. Laura was extremely fond of travelling by omnibus with Miss Mossbanks and Violet, and the jests and irony that passed between driver and passengers, or one driver and another, amused and entertained her. The Metropolitan was functioning, but the Deverell family seldom ventured on it—no one being ever in a particular hurry to get anywhere, and Mr. Deverell having no interests to take him to the City. Rosa hated and feared it above all things, and forbade Miss Mossbanks, who was not at all inclined for the experiment, to take the children on it. One day, however, Rosa took James and the two girls to visit Florrie Peddler, an event that happened about twice yearly. After taking tea, and paying their respects to the invalid, and listening to a funny song on the new phonograph, they prepared to depart, and discovered that the brougham had not yet returned for them. They waited, and still it did not come. As Rosa had invited Mr. and Mrs. Bonner, Amelia and Felix (who was home for the Easter holidays) to dinner, it was necessary to get home as quickly as possible, so as it was growing late, she decided to try the Metropolitan. Alone she would never have attempted it, but with James and Laura there, she felt she might make the experiment. When the little train came puffing in she began to regret her temerity but they found seats, and all went well until the train entered a tunnel and stopped.

"The signal's against us, I expect," said James, whose face was pressed against the window. "We'll go on in a minute."

But they did not go on, and the acrid, smoky air began to be most oppressive. There was a very good-looking young man of about twenty-eight sitting opposite, and at this crisis, he exchanged a word or two with James about the management of the trains. Violet began fidgeting and complaining, and saying she felt ill, and certainly in the dim light they all looked ghastly enough. The young man assured her there was no cause for alarm, and for a moment she was quieter. Then suddenly, without warning, she fell into a panic, clutched Rosa wildly, and went into hysterics, screaming, crying and laughing in the most alarming way, just as, not so many years ago, Rosa had been in the habit of doing. The young man came to Rosa's assistance and tried to pacify her, and as soon as he was within reach Violet released her hold of her mother and clung to him with the strength of a little wild cat. Rosa, her face looking paper-white in the dim light, slapped the child's hands and called her "My precious, my lamb!" and implored her to stop. James and Laura, unable to help, sat watching with anxious faces.

"Does she often do this?" the young man asked, trying to hold Violet's febrile hands.

"Never. Never before," Rosa cried, half out of her mind with fear. "But she's such a nervous, sensitive child. I ought never to have brought her here. Oh, has no one smelling-salts—brandy? Oh, my darling, don't, don't. She will die if nothing is done for her!"

No one had brandy or smelling-salts, had anything to offer, in fact, except advice. Laura feared that her mother, too, would be overcome.

"It's all right, mamma. It's just hysterics. There's plenty of air, it's only nasty and smoky. There's nothing to be frightened of. Violet! Stop it. Control yourself. Can't you see how you're frightening mamma?"

"She's only pretending," said James, whose watchful, intelligent eyes had hardly left his younger sister's face. At this she screamed all the louder, and clung to the young man with such frenzy that he was half strangled. Her body became rigid, and her eyes rolled terrifyingly. Luckily, at this moment the train started, and they were soon puffing into the station. Violet's screams ceased, and though she continued to sob, it was evident that she was recovering. As soon as the young man tried to release himself, however, she screamed again.

"Could you—*would* you get out with us?" begged the distracted Rosa. "She seems to have such confidence in you. She's had such a shocking fright, poor darling."

He acquiesced, with a very good grace, and together the little party made its way into the open air, Violet retaining the young man's hand. Rosa was much too frightened and upset to be surprised at this sudden affection for a perfect stranger, and was only thankful they had got out alive. As they emerged from the station, however, she said;

"Now Violet, my darling, thank this gentleman for all his kindness to you." But Violet had not yet exhausted her ingenuity. She looked up at him with her lovely blue eyes, the tears still shining on her cheeks, and said;

"Oh, please, won't you walk home with us? Then I'll feel safe."

James, too disgusted to speak, walked on ahead, and Laura followed him, not knowing what to make of these extraordinary happenings.

"If she were my daughter," said James, "I'd give her a beating she'd remember."

As a small child, Violet had been extremely flirtatious, and would ogle male visitors out of the corners of her eyes in a way that even Rosa and Harry thought highly diverting. But she was now fifteen, and an infatuation of this sort was something more than a childish prank. Rosa was embarrassed, and hardly knew what to do or where to look, but she wished above all things to avoid a scene in the High Street, so begged the young man to return with them and take a little refreshment. He agreed to this, and carried off the whole affair very well, treating it as a perfectly ordinary happening. They overtook James and Laura waiting on the doorstep. The two had decided to ignore Violet, and no sooner were they within doors than they vanished upstairs. But Rosa presently called Laura down to the drawing-room, where she found her sister reclining on the sofa with a rug over her, partaking of a little Madeira and a biscuit, as were Rosa and the stranger.

"Laura," Rosa said, "I want to introduce you to Captain Kershaw. Oddly enough he knows the Merton-Stuarts, quite well. Isn't the world small?"

Laura gave him her hand, agreeing that the world was very small. Nervously she asked if she too might have a little Madeira, and the young man sprang to pour her out a glass.

"Captain Kershaw," Rosa went on, "has been in the Zulu wars, think of it! And was wounded, and invalided home."

Laura tried to be pleasant, but felt stiff and unnatural. She realized that the young man had behaved quite admirably under very trying conditions and that he was to blame for nothing that had happened that afternoon, but in her disapproval of Violet and of the whole affair, she included him.

"My daughter and Miss Olga Merton-Stuart are dear friends, as well as distant cousins," Rosa chattered on, the Madeira having restored her to normal, "so it is quite possible that you will meet again, especially as you are going to their ball. You must give me your address, and I will send you an invitation for our little dance in June." The young man did so, and presently got up to go. At this there was a little moan from Violet.

"We cannot thank you enough," said Rosa, holding one of his hands in both her own. "Without you this afternoon, I daren't think what might have happened. I'm sure I should have fainted myself. Never again will I trust myself or any of my family in that dreadful place. Violet, darling, tell Captain Kershaw how sorry you are to have given him so much trouble."

As he approached the sofa, Violet lifted her eyes.

"But I couldn't help it, dearest mamma," she said faintly.

Captain Kershaw picked up the little limp hand that lay on the rug.

"Poor child. Well, don't let it happen again, unless I'm there. I hope, at any rate, you'll be none the worse for it. Do you like sweets?"

"Oh, yes," said Violet, with a heavenly smile.

"Very well, I'll send you some."

"You are really too kind," Rosa murmured, wondering how long it would take her to dress. She had meant to experiment with her new hair, pinning it on in different ways, but there was no time for that now. "Do come and see us soon. My husband will be most anxious to thank you himself."

"Mamma!" cried Laura, as soon as the front door had closed upon the visitor, "I hope none of us will ever see that man again. I don't know *what* he must think of us, and of Violet. It's all been perfectly dreadful, and I think Violet ought to be punished. I do, and so does James."

"Laura!" exclaimed Rosa. "I'm surprised that you should speak so of your sister. She was badly frightened and her nerves gave way. I was like that myself at her age." She turned to Violet. "You couldn't help it, could you, my pet?"

"She *could* have helped it," insisted Laura. "If he hadn't been there, she wouldn't have thought of it. James and I don't intend to speak to her until she says she is sorry."

"I don't care whether you speak to me or not," wailed Violet from the sofa. "You needn't ever speak to me again. I don't care. I know you hate me, and James too. I wish I was dead!"

Laura hurried upstairs without listening to Rosa's accusations of cruelty. She was ready to make all due allowances for her younger sister, who was at a difficult age, but she knew beyond any doubt that the hysterics had been "put on" and admirably acted. It was a painful exhibition of precocity and she was amazed that her mother couldn't see it. There was evidently much more in Violet than met the eye, and Laura, at this revelation, was shocked and disquieted. What did Violet think about all the time? How much did she know? She was so secretive. She made up her mind to see a great deal more of her than she had been doing and leave her less in the hands of Miss Mossbanks. As usual, Laura, as she hurriedly dressed for dinner, blamed herself. Certainly she had no desire to see Captain Kershaw again, and would tell Olga so at the first opportunity. How unfortunate that it had happened. Had she met him in any other way, under any other circumstances, how different everything might have been. He was certainly handsome, with a well set up, soldierly figure, and the nicest eyes imaginable. He looked tremendously alive and healthy, and in spite of his natural embarrassment, he had behaved with quite extraordinary ease. She had seen Violet looking at him the moment they got into the train. How had she managed to think of such a thing, and in the midst of her fright, too? For Laura admitted to herself that Violet had probably been frightened. She hadn't liked that smoky blackness and the long wait herself. But how queer that two emotions so different should exist at one and the same time in the child's head! It was strange, and alarming.

Something honest and sincere and sensitive in Laura had received a painful shock. Was that what Violet was going to be like? If so, how very worrying!

CHAPTER IV

THERE was fighting in the Transvaal, where twelve hundred Basutos had made a surprise attack on the British forces; there was war in Albania (everyone much admired Caton Woodville's sketches of the picturesque Albanians in the illustrated magazines), and Cabinet Ministers hoped the trouble would not spread; English soldiers were killed in the sortie from Kandahar; Lord Mountmorres was murdered in Ireland, and the outlook there was blacker than ever; the Queen, worried and harassed, took a much needed holiday at Balmoral and did water colour sketches. That winter of the year 1881 was full of alarms, but all London danced the waltz (was the reverse going out? Some people said so) and Laura danced, listened to the talk of her elders and tried to find out what sort of world she had been born into. It was hoped that the spring would bring better tidings, but it brought instead Majuba Hill, Laing's Neck and Kruger, whose name was on everyone's lips. In March the Emperor of Russia was murdered. An attempt had been made on his life in February of the preceding year, when dynamite was laid under the floor of the dining saloon, but, owing to the lateness of the Prince of Hesse's arrival for dinner, it went off prematurely, killing some menservants. There had been such a round-up of anarchists after this that it was hoped the danger was over, but that day in March the assassins were determined to do or die. Two bombs were thrown as the Emperor was driving out escorted by his Cossacks. The first missed him, exploding among his escort, the second, hurled at his feet as he bent over his wounded soldiers, completely shattered both legs. He was taken to the Palace, his legs were amputated, he died. Europe shuddered. In peaceful America General Garfield had just been elected President, he, too, to fall a martyr the same year. The elected head of a democracy, the hereditary Tzar of an absolute monarchy were alike laid low by the anarchist's hand.

"The world isn't the nice place to live in it used to be," sighed Rosa when this occurred. "We were all born too late. I'm sure these things didn't happen when I was a girl." She put it down to a thing called Modernity, which seemed to change everything for the worse. So she and Harry opposed Modernity, which in their eyes was a sort of disease that someone really ought to do something about.

"Papa would like an Act of Parliament which would make time illegal," said James. "Sometimes I think the world's populated by half-wits."

When Disraeli died, Laura and James, who had a great admiration for that brilliant, charming and picturesque "arriviste," wore crêpe on their arms for three days, to the fury and disgust of Harry when he discovered it, which was not until the last day.

Laura's début had been on the whole successful, and she was not at all dissatisfied with her present existence. As long as things were peaceful at home between James and his parents, as long as Violet behaved herself and wasn't insufferably arch with such males as came to the house, as long as she saw Amelia and Olga and a young married friend named Emmie Trueman several times a week, and went to a dance now and again, and sometimes a musical "squash" at someone's house where she could see and watch a great many people, Laura was fairly happy at this time, and was far from being exigent in her demands. She was a healthy girl, and suffered only from heavy winter colds (for which Rosa was a great believer in the mustard foot-bath) and chilblains, which everyone assured her she would outgrow in time.

Olga's affair with the young man in the Seventeenth had been discovered and broken off, as he was found to be, except for his pay, quite penniless. But all was forgiven, and Olga stayed on with her Aunt Susan, who missed her married daughters and had no other interests beyond entertaining, and searching the advertisement columns of the *Times* for servants, especially footmen, who continually disappointed her. Olga soon began another affair with the younger son of a peer, and showed great spirit in planning small adventures and indiscretions.

"I don't know how you dare," said Laura, who was both shy and conscientious. Infinitely more daring in thought than Olga, she was far less daring in deed.

She had seen Captain Kershaw at the Merton-Stuart's dance, but gave him the cold shoulder and would not dance with him. She had a fantastic idea that he might imagine Violet was used by her mother as a decoy, and she was so eager to prove to him that on the contrary they were all thoroughly ashamed of the child's behaviour, that she could not bring herself to smile upon him. He was piqued and curious, and being a young man of great self-confidence, tried not only once but twice to get her to dance with him, and, after two refusals, she was frequently conscious that he was looking at her. He even went so far as to ask Olga in what way he had offended Miss Deverell, and Olga answered:

"Oh, Laura's a great silly. She takes things too seriously. I keep telling her that she's old-fashioned and that her principles are really the last of fly time, but she won't listen to me."

He called once at Kensington Square, but Laura refused to appear, and as Violet was not allowed to he was entertained by Rosa and Harry. He did not come to their dance, and Laura hoped with complete insincerity that she had seen the last of him. Violet, by her outrageous behaviour, had made acquaintance with him possible and further acquaintance impossible. It was sad, because she had to confess to herself that she found him far more attractive than any other young man she had met. It was easier for Laura to make friends with older men than young ones, for she lacked Olga's gift of badinage and coquetry and at the same time was a little shy of talking about the things that really interested her for fear of being called that dreadful thing, a blue-stocking. Companionship with James had made her intolerant of mere tittle-tattle, and she was cursed with the sort of self-consciousness that obliges people to hear and criticize their own words before they utter them.

Mr. Lamb had now departed to his Theological College, and James studied alone. His recurrent fevers, when he ran a temperature of 104 for two or three days at a time, his unsatisfactory heart, his frequent heavy colds made attendance at a University both unwise and unprofitable, so he remained at home, appearing, upon the surface, content with his lot, and Laura alone knew how often he was bored, lonely and despairing. Rosa loved him in her narrow, unimaginative way, but his brains frightened her, and she felt that for her to have given birth to an agnostic was a piece of gross unfairness. She and Harry continued to hope that he would outgrow his follies, and Rosa had dreams of his one day coming to her and saying, with humble mien, "Mamma, I have been wrong and foolish. Will you forgive me, and let me go to Divine Service with you once more?" But at eighteen he was more than ever confirmed in his attitude toward religion, popular prejudice, and the herd mind. He wrote poetry, which he showed only to Laura, and spent a good deal of time at the piano, driving Rosa nearly frantic with his careful and reverent rendering of Bach, which sounded to her like exercises. Harry gave him almost no money, nor would he ask for any, and father and son hardly spoke except at the table, and then only when they must. From time to time James saw Felix Bonner, who had grown a moustache and looked very mature. James had never envied Felix, and envied him less than ever now that he saw him becoming the conventional citizen and conformer. He was still at Cambridge, where he seemed to study little else besides Latin and Greek verse, and his conversation was chiefly concerned with cricket and girls. He was an occasional visitor at a house in St. John's Wood which he assured James was exceedingly well managed and quite respectable. There was a little Irish girl in particular whose name he would gladly give. A lot of the fellows from Cambridge knew about it, and so far there had not been any trouble. James, who knew very well that he could not possibly afford such excursions into life, was contemptuous of all bought love, and Felix went away with the impression that James had won the favours of some young married woman in society. James, perfectly aware of having given this impression, felt completely disgusted with himself, and decided that a man could only keep his spiritual virtue when he was quite alone.

One day he received a letter from Mr. John. It was the first his old tutor had ever written to him, and by some miracle it reached his hands without being seen by either Rosa or Harry. The reading of it threw him into a state of excitement that was rare with him. As soon as an opportunity offered itself, he showed the letter to Laura, and she learned that Mr. John had inherited a small legacy and was coming to London to live, leaving the cottage in Westmoreland, where he had lived with his sister, for ever.

"You cannot imagine," Mr. John wrote, "or perhaps you can, what pleasure you would be conferring on me—an old man who has not many more years to live—if you would let me help you in any way that I can. I beg you to consult Miss Laura, and discuss with her the possibility of my being of some use to you. Perhaps now that two years have passed, and you are older, your parents would not seriously object to our meeting from time to time. There is little more that I can do toward diverting your mind from the shallow ditches they dug for it—poor channels in which it could never have flowed to any purpose. There is something beautifully ironical in a legacy, even a small one, that comes so late, for neither my sister nor I care for money, or the things money buys; so that if I am denied the pleasure of helping you, my dear boy, the irony will be complete and perfect."

"Do you think papa would allow you to see him?" Laura asked.

"I've no intention of telling him," said James. "He would make such ridiculous observations, and such silly threats that I would have to blush for him."

"But if they were to find out," she said, "there'd be a terrible to-do."

"I needn't be found out. Anyway I'm eighteen. If I hadn't been delicate I would have gone to Oxford, where I could have formed what friendships I pleased, without consulting them."

In the course of the next few months Mr. John moved into a tiny house in Chelsea, near Carlyle's old home, and installed there himself, his affable widowed sister, and a Westmoreland servant. James assisted at the moving-in, and arranged the books that, in spite of poverty, Mr. John had managed to collect. Laura, who was never allowed out by herself, was sometimes allowed to go out with James, though Rosa and Harry would have preferred that she did not, for in their minds freedom of thinking was closely connected with looseness of living, and they never felt sure that James was a safe companion for his sister. On the pretext of going to a museum or merely for a walk they frequently went together to Cheyne Row, for by this time Laura was convinced in her own mind that they were doing nothing wrong, and the fact that they were forced to deceive their parents seemed to her more their misfortune than their fault.

Old as Mr. John and his sister were, they could and did keep in close touch with the thoughts and feelings of the young generation, and the talk she heard under that roof had the most purgative effect on Laura's mind, and successfully counteracted the almost insane prudishness of her parents and of Miss Mossbanks, the sentimental and unsatisfied curiosity of Amelia Bonner, and the feverish preoccupation of Olga Merton-Stuart. To hear the calm, full-bosomed Mrs. Lovelace—who resembled Queen Victoria with her small features and prominent eyes with drooping lids—talk sensibly and sometimes learnedly about anything from Chinese art to the age-long problem of prostitution was to Laura a revelation. Those talks in Cheyne Row shook her mind into a kind of order and pattern it had not possessed before and helped to clear up many things that until then had been obscure to her.

"You see, these people are what human beings were intended to be—human," said James one day as they walked home, "and you may not meet many more in this world of shams and shadows."

James contributed his say to these discussions with nervous fire. His hands fluttered as he talked, his eager, intelligent eyes went from face to face, he seemed, when mentally stimulated and excited, to draw upon some source outside himself. Intuitive, sensitive, febrile, his brain functioned best under opposition or attack, and it was Mr. John's habit to provide the opposition. In his worn velvet smoking jacket, his neat snowy beard reposing upon his chest, the tips of his fingers touching each other, his eyes looking out through a mass of humorous wrinkles, he would quietly launch verbal darts in James's direction and watch the boy catch and destroy them. At first, Laura was diffident, and only spoke when a remark was addressed to her, but she soon began to enjoy the sound of her own voice, and entered freely into the discussions.

Among her female friends she had been hearing a good deal of talk about Spiritualism—at that time a kind of adult parlour game indulged in with more enthusiasm by ladies than by gentlemen—but she had read nothing on the subject. Olga used the planchette board with varying success, and Emmie Trueman told of psychic circles and table-tippings at her mother's house every Friday afternoon. Laura one day discovered in Mr. John's library a book by Judge Edmonds and Dr. Dexter, published in New York in the thirties, which related conversations purporting to come from Swedenborg and Francis Bacon. This she read with a lively interest, but she told Mr. John she thought it a little odd for Bacon to begin his communications with Edmonds with "Well, Judge—" which was precisely the mode of address the Judge himself would have used.

He was pleased by her scepticism, as he was pleased by all scepticism that was honest.

"Read everything you do read with a critical mind," he said. "In an age of silly and easy faith this is imperative. We are too much moulded by our time. Try to escape that. My advice to the young is to doubt whatever is accepted by their elders, until logically convinced of its truth and worth."

"But oughtn't I to feel ashamed to hold opinions contrary to those of people older and probably wiser than myself?" Laura asked. "I am constantly doing it, but I can't help feeling it's a form of conceit."

"Age has nothing to do with it. Age is so often silly," Mr. John told her, his dark eyes sparkling above his white beard. "Mistrust age. With all due respect, I consider you and James infinitely wiser than your parents."

"James is, certainly," Laura agreed.

"You too. You are far too modest. You think that because you are a woman you must necessarily be inferior to your brother. Up to a point I believe this to be true, yet you are certainly mentally superior to—shall we say your father? I think a first-rate female brain will always be inferior to a first-rate male brain, perhaps because it is man's function to give, to create, woman's to receive and to mould. The functions of the body seem to me to be charmingly repeated in the functions of the brain. I may be wrong, of course, but so far history has not disproved my theory."

"You think James remarkable, don't you?" Laura asked eagerly.

"I do," the old man said. "If only his health were better—"

"Oh, James's health is the worry of my life," Laura exclaimed. "I would give him mine if I could, willingly."

"You must keep yours," he told her, smiling, "for your children."

"Oh . . . children . . ." Laura coloured a little. "I doubt if I ever marry. I couldn't bear to leave James."

Mr. John and Mrs. Lovelace considered Laura a young woman of great attractions, and delighted to have her there. They discussed her and took pride in her as though she had been a daughter. They greatly admired the brownness of her skin in a day when a white skin was thought to be the only one for beauty. They admired the slightly flattened and un-English look of her face given to it by the broad brow and broad cheek-bones and small, straight nose. Her mouth was slightly prominent like the mouth of a pretty Japanese woman, and she smiled with most unconscious seductiveness. Her whole face had a hint of the Orient about it which the clear blue eyes contrived to offset. (Only James had brown eyes like his father, both the girls imitating Rosa in this respect.) They considered her the ideal modern girl, thoughtful, independent-minded, careful of the feelings of others, affectionate, intelligent, critical, not at all priggish, and not afraid of words.

"She is, of course, the 'revolting daughter' that one reads so much about in the papers," said Mrs. Lovelace, "but how right she is to revolt!"

It was a pleasant little walk from Kensington Square to Cheyne Row, and it took Laura and James, walking slowly, between half and three quarters of an hour to cover the distance. One day they chanced to leave the house just before Violet and Miss Mossbanks started out for their afternoon exercise, and Violet, spying them from a distance, persuaded Miss Mossbanks (who saw no harm in it), that it would be fun to follow them. Miss Mossbanks supposed the Chelsea Embankment, where it was pleasant to walk and look at the river and the barges, to be their objective, and anyway she had intended pointing out to Violet Number 4 Cheyne Walk in which George Eliot had died three months before. They kept James and Laura well in sight all the way, and Miss Mossbanks was as surprised as Violet to see them stop at a little house in Cheyne Row and ring the door-bell. They had nearly overtaken them when this happened, and Violet, encouraged by the fact that the two were deep in talk, had been on the point of running up behind them and crying "Boo!" to make them turn round. Now the astonished pursuers stood still and watched.

"I never knew your mamma had any friends in Chelsea except Mr. and Mrs. Dowdie," said Miss Mossbanks, wonderingly.

"I don't think she has," answered Violet, staring. "It must be a secret. I know they have a secret. Someone's opening the door. Look, it's an old man. How funny! Oh, why, it's . . . it's Mr. John!"

"It's Mr. John!" exclaimed Miss Mossbanks at the same instant, and the two clutched each other, drawn together by this mystery. Miss Mossbanks, who had been with the Deverells for nine years, was leaving at the end of the summer, and Violet and Laura were to share a maid instead. Violet was glad Miss Mossbanks was going, and Miss Mossbanks knew it and resented it. But now they felt as one, and shrank back, hand in hand, as though they had come upon a dead body.

"Well, I declare!" exclaimed Miss Mossbanks, shocked and startled. "It's that dreadful, wicked old man again. Whatever will your papa and mamma say?"

Violet pulled at her arm and drew her yet further away. She was flushed with excitement, anger and jealousy. They had kept an important secret from her, and the thought of being kept out of secrets was torture to Violet.

"They might see us from the window. Oh, aren't they awful? The mean sneaks! And they never told me a word. I'll pay them out. I'm going to tell papa and mamma. Mean, horrid sneaks, that's what they are."

She suddenly burst into tears and began walking rapidly toward home. Miss Mossbanks, who disliked walking fast, had difficulty in keeping up with her, and clutched, now and again, at her arm.

"Violet, you're not to cry in the streets. It's most ill bred. You're not a child any longer. Do you hear me? Stop it at once. And don't tear along like that. What ever will people think? Look at that old lady staring. I do declare, you all seem bent on disgracing your papa and mamma in some way. Now stop it, Violet, stop it, I say."

Moral indignation presently replaced wounded feelings, and Violet grew calmer.

"I can't wait to tell mamma and papa what an awful thing those two are doing. It seems as though an angel must have whispered to me to follow them today. I knew I had to follow them as soon as I saw them. If it hadn't been for that we'd never have known."

"Evil doing is always found out sooner or later," Miss Mossbanks said. "Violet, *will* you please not walk so fast? We are not walking for a wager."

"I want to get home to tell papa. And I'm going to tell him myself, please, Miss Mossbanks. It's my affair. It was I who wanted to follow them."

"I think your papa would prefer that I told him," said the governess. "You're much too ready to push yourself forward. You must remember, please, that you're still a little girl, and hardly out of the schoolroom, though your papa does see fit to stop your education before it's time."

"You said just now when I was crying that I wasn't a child any longer. Well, I'll show you I'm not. Papa would much rather hear about it from me. Besides, Laura is my sister, not yours."

"I have never claimed that Laura was my sister," said Miss Mossbanks precisely, "but she was once my pupil, and you are still my pupil until I leave you in September, and you will kindly do as I say and stop contradicting. You've been very rude all day. I really don't know what's come over you."

"I don't see what right you have to interfere," said Violet. "If it hadn't been for me, you'd never have known anything about it. I want to tell papa and I shall."

The return home degenerated into an undignified race. By a little ruse— "Look, is that your mamma looking out of her window?"—Miss Mossbanks, panting, gained the wide step and rang the bell before Violet, who had paused to look up, could reach it. But neck and neck they entered the house when Grace opened the door, neck and neck they crossed the hall and reached the door of Harry's library. Two knuckles rapped as one, and neck and neck they entered the room.

Rosa and Harry were both there. They had been to Bond Street to buy Rosa a bonnet, and had returned at four. Rosa was doing some needlework and Harry was reading aloud from a book of African travel.

"Mamma!" cried Violet, "whatever do you think I have found out?"

"Violet, kindly allow me to speak first," said Miss Mossbanks, trying to interpose her person between Violet and her parents.

"What is it, what is it?" asked Harry irritably. "You come bursting in here as if the house were on fire."

"Papa, will you let me tell you, please?"

"Violet, will you kindly be quiet?" ordered Miss Mossbanks. She felt that a grave duty rested on her shoulders and she had no intention of allowing Violet to shift it. "You're a rude girl to interrupt so."

"Let Miss Mossbanks speak, Violet," said Rosa. "What has happened? You seem very excited."

"If you have anything to say, Miss Mossbanks, say it at once," commanded Harry.

She told her story, not without interruptions and interpolations from Violet, who wished to be given credit for an idea that, she assured them, must have come to her from some supernatural source. The effect of this joint recital was tremendous, and exceeded even Violet's expectations. Harry was horrified, thunderstruck. Rosa was shocked and upset. They omitted to praise Violet for the discovery, and she had to listen while Miss Mossbanks was commended for so clearly perceiving where lay her duty to her employers. They were both warned by Harry to say nothing whatever to James and Laura when they returned. It was evident that he thought the matter extremely grave, and that, left alone, he would work himself into a fine passion over it.

Violet went upstairs a little crestfallen. Now that the affair had been taken out of her hands, she found less satisfaction in it. She was a little bored with being on the side of the angels, and reflected that if James and Laura had only had the decency to let her into the secret, she would never have told. So it was all their fault. Also it paid Laura out for being so horrid to *her* friend Captain Kershaw, so that he never came again after that one call. This had long rankled in her private breast, for she had had serious intentions in regard to Captain Kershaw from the first moment she had laid eyes on him. An affection for the lovely, high-spirited child—expressed by gifts of sweets and trinkets—was to have ripened into love for the beautiful young girl, and she had planned to marry him at St. Margaret's, Westminster, at eighteen. If it chanced that Laura should be still unmarried, so much the better. But Laura had rudely shattered the dream, and all that had resulted from the adventure was one paltry box of sweets and an increased vigilance on the part of her mother. She sat in her room, listening for the return of the other two, and wishing she had said nothing, until such time as it might have pleased her to reveal to them that she knew. "I suppose you think I don't know where you go when you go out together? Well, I do, and if you don't do this or that, I'll tell." Oh, what an opportunity missed!

The two returned at six, and were asked by Grace to go at once to see their papa in the library.

"They've found out something," James whispered as they knocked on the door. This was a formality Harry insisted upon, though he never did anything there except look through books of sporting prints, sleep, search for an occasional winner, and read books on African travel illustrated by pen drawings of black men carrying shields and assegais. For Harry was an enthusiastic Imperialist, and believed in civilization for black men no matter what the consequences to them.

Now they found him standing with his back to the empty grate, his hands behind him and his narrow head thrust forward, while his cold eyes accused them and scanned their faces for the guilt that he expected to see there.

He was growing thinner and bonier as his years increased, and his complexion, owing to a troublesome liver, was sallow. His hair and side-whiskers, once of a much admired red-gold tint, were now drab and mixed with grey. He had pouches under his eyes and about his mouth. Rosa had been sent to her room, and it was plain to both his children that he was in a fine ripe state of moral indignation, and that they were in for a bad time.

"What is this I hear?" he demanded, when they had closed the door in obedience to his gesture. "What is this I am told? Can I believe my ears? Is it possible that my son and my eldest daughter, while living under my roof and eating my bread, have been practicing a deception as disgraceful as it is dishonourable?"

"Hadn't you better tell us just what you mean, papa?" asked Laura. She thought it possible they might have forgotten to lock the cupboard in James's room, and wished to give away no more than they need.

"Do you dare to pretend that you don't know what I mean? Have you the effrontery to assume an innocence you do not possess?"

"Shall I tell you what you mean, sir?" asked James, purposely provoking his father in order to bring matters more quickly to a head. "Then you needn't waste your time asking so many questions." His hands and eyes twitched with nervousness, but he stood erect and faced his father boldly.

"Hold your tongue, sir!" shouted Harry, whose voice till now had been moderate in pitch. "This thing is so outrageous, so unbelievable, that if it were not for the evidence of two pairs of trusty eyes I could scarcely credit it. You, my eldest daughter, in whom I had placed the completest confidence, you, sir, my only son, who, by reason of your delicate health have been treated with a consideration and care you could not otherwise have hoped for, you have both of you wilfully deceived us. It is terrible to think of, terrible. Understandable, perhaps, in a young man who has openly denied his God, but you, Laura—what an example for your younger sister! What an example, I say! What infamous behaviour. But I blame your brother. You were acting under his guidance. He has contaminated you. I am so shocked, horrified, grieved, I can hardly find words to express myself."

"What you are trying to say, I suppose, is this," suggested James. "Laura and I have been seen going to visit Mr. John, in Chelsea. The two pairs of trusty eyes must have been Miss Mossbanks's and dear little Violet's. Well, it's quite true. We have been, a number of times. I took Laura because I knew it would be good for her to talk to people with brains and ideas."

"Good for her!" shouted Harry. "Good for her? Are you in your right mind? Good for her—to be taken to the house of that—that perverter of the young, that arch-fiend, that anti-Christ, that sly, lecherous old villain—?"

"Oh, papa!" Laura exclaimed, "it's absurd, really, to talk like that. He's none of those things. You may not happen to agree with him, but—"

"*I* agree with him?" cried Harry, almost frenzied. "I agree with that—that—good God! What a thing to say! Are you mad too?"

"I think deceit is nearly always wrong," said Laura, her face very pale now, and her hands locked nervously in front of her, "and I am sorry we had to deceive you. But we wouldn't have done so if you had been more tolerant and more understanding. We knew there'd be a dreadful fuss, and James and I are not children—"

"Tolerant?" he cried, his face dreadful to look upon. "Is one tolerant of what is evil—foul? Is one tolerant of the devil? Are my children crazy? You say I would have made a fuss. I would have done nothing of the sort. I would have forbidden you to go near that man, that fiend in human form. If I could get the law on him I'd do it tomorrow. You will neither of you hold any further communication with him or see him again. If you, James, persist, you leave my house. As for Laura, she shall be sent abroad. Now do you understand me?"

"You'd turn me out of the house, I suppose?" asked James, with the first signs of excitement he had shown.

"I would. You could go where you pleased, but you would leave this roof. You have persistently turned your face against everything your mother and I have tried to do for you. You are ungrateful and dishonourable."

The door opened and Rosa came in, closing it behind her again. She looked frightened and distressed, and her prominent blue eyes had tears in them. Laura, who was fond of her mother, went to her and put an arm about her waist, but Rosa, well drilled by Harry, pushed it away and sat on the sofa, looking deeply injured and miserable.

"I think you had better not have come," said Harry, in a voice that shook with anger. "I told you not to come. This thing is even worse than I imagined it could be."

"They're my children too," she reminded him, her handkerchief to her face. "Your disobedience and deceitfulness," she said, looking from one to the other, "will probably kill me. I have never had such a shock in all my life."

"Oh, mamma!" cried Laura, "it isn't as bad as all that. Really it isn't. You're exaggerating it."

"You can't have had very many shocks, mamma," said James, "if the fact that Laura and I have been to see our old tutor is the worst. You ought to think yourself very fortunate."

"Be quiet, sir!" shouted Harry. "How dare you speak so to your mother?"

"I won't be quiet," James threw back at him, his self-control and calm suddenly abandoned. "I hadn't the slightest wish to be born into this silly, hypocritical world, least of all into any family of yours. But as long as I'm here I maintain the right to say and to think what I please. I'm very fond of mamma, and I'm sorry to hurt her, but nothing *you* may say or do can affect me in the least. You have just one idea in your head—the family idea. You think a family is a lump for you to thump and pound into any shape you please. Well, I've been thumped and pounded enough. I'm not going to stand any more of it. I've got a right to my own life, and I mean to make the most of it. I doubt very much if I'll live to be more than thirty with a heart and constitution like mine, so I'll have to hurry as it is. I mean to get out of this house just as soon as I possibly can, and stay out of it."

"Oh, James, darling, don't talk like that!" Laura cried, wild with distress. She clung to his arm. To what dreadful lengths might not this silly family quarrel lead?

"It's no good, Laura, I'm not going to spend the best years of my life bickering with my parents. I'm going to Mr. John's tomorrow and I mean to stay as long as he'll have me. I wish you could come too."

Harry's rage and fury turned to ice. He shook as though with a great cold. He had clung to a chair for support, and for a moment Laura thought he meant to pick it up and hurl it at James.

"Oh, you think you'll go tomorrow, do you? You're mistaken. You'll go tonight. Out you go, tonight, do you hear me? The sooner the better. We are well rid of a viper . . . a viper!"

But this was too much for Rosa, who burst into loud sobs.

"Oh, James, James, why must you act like this? Why must you make us all miserable? Don't you love us at all? We've tried so hard to do our best for you."

"Don't plead with him," ordered Harry, "you might as well plead with a viper. Don't speak to him again. This is no longer our son. I disinherit him. This is a reptile, a fiend!"

"Oh, papa, don't talk so *idiotically!*" cried Laura, distracted. "It's silly to call James a viper and a fiend for going when you are forcing him to go. Oh, mamma, can't you do anything but cry? Must we lose James? James, don't listen to papa. He doesn't mean it. Oh, it's all so *stupid!*"

"It is," James agreed. He was breathing very fast, the whites of his eyes showed alarmingly, and his nostrils looked pinched. Slim, delicate, wearing an old suit he had outgrown, he yet managed to dominate the situation, and to make his father ridiculous. "It is, but I'm going all the same. I couldn't stay here with *him*. Mamma, you and I can still meet, can't we, or are you going to let him separate us for ever?"

"Rosa!" shouted Harry, "you will do exactly as I tell you. You will hold no further communication with this ingrate. Neither will Laura. Understand, both of you."

"Oh, James," Laura implored, holding him by the arm, "he doesn't mean it. He can't. It's all so senseless. Wait till this blows over. Papa will think differently tomorrow . . ."

"Get out of this house!" Harry commanded, leaning on the chair-back. "Tonight. Now. Go up and pack your box, before I lay hands on you!"

"I'll pack when I please. Laura, we'll meet somehow, don't worry. And I'll see mamma too, if she has spirit enough."

"Get out!" his father shouted. "Get out! And when you pack, see that you take nothing that does not belong to you."

He raised a threatening fist, and Rosa, seeing that he was beyond any self-control, got between him and James.

"My son is not a thief! No, no, no!" She threw her arms about James's neck, sobbing. Laura, with her hands to her head, cried, "Oh, how silly this is, how silly! Are we all mad?"

"Only one of us," said James, releasing himself from his mother's embrace. "Don't cry, mamma, we'll meet somehow." He turned toward his father. "Kindly discontinue that extremely inadequate allowance. I don't wish to receive anything from *you*. Laura, come and help me pack."

He went out of the room as Harry took a step toward him and Laura darted after him, shutting the door. They went quickly up the three flights of stairs to James's room, and at the top James staggered, gave a cry, and clung to the banisters. Laura seized him in her arms, and supported him into his room where he collapsed on the bed. She screamed out, "Mamma! Mamma!" without much hope of being heard, and then ran to loosen James's collar and get the drops the doctor prescribed for him. She managed to force them between his lips, then propped him up, in the position in which he could best get his difficult breath. His colour was dreadful, and the sound of his gasping was torture. For a few moments she went through the most acute agony and despair of her life. There were no bells on the top floor, and she dared not leave him long enough to run for help. She thought he was dying, and the awful suspense of those few minutes remained with her all through life. She bent over him with pleadings and anguished endearments and prayers, until at last the pain lessened and gradually his breathing became easier. At last he managed to say to her, through his blue lips, "Don't tell them, I'll be better . . . presently." Then he closed his eyes again and lay still. As he lay there, white and stricken, Laura plumbed the very depths of pity and of pain. His face wore a look of purity and remoteness, and a kind of sweet reticence that wrung her heart. He was all she loved, and he was so little hers. He had his own personal, lonely life to lead, a life that she knew could never be happy, though it might have in it moments of happiness never reached by her. It was a face that, young as it was, seemed to turn itself away from easy joys, to look with coldness on the things of ordinary human concern. James's spirit sought rare and difficult satisfactions, it would sit and sun itself on peaks at which she could only look. And those two downstairs did not even know of its existence. They trampled on it without even seeing it, with their clumsy feet . . . the feet of the herd. . .

"Oh, James, you're better, darling! Tell me you're better!"

"I'm better. Don't tell them anything. I don't want bedside forgiveness. Just let me lie still a while."

Presently he wanted to get up and pack, but she made him lie down again. She got out his old tin trunk and began to put his things into it. When she had packed his clothes and personal effects, she made a parcel of his books. While she was busy at this, he said;

"Laura, you must learn to hate papa. Otherwise he'll ruin your life. There are some people it's necessary to hate, in self-defence, and he's one of them."

"I don't feel it's fair to hate him, and take food and clothes from him," Laura said.

"He's responsible for you," James said. "The law can make a man feed and clothe his children. At least promise me you won't let him tyrannize over you."

"I'll try not to. But he can always stop my allowance. What would I do if he turned me out as he has you?"

"He won't. Besides, I turned myself out."

"He might send me abroad."

"As long as you have contempt for him, and realize that he is a stupid, bigoted man, and ought to be obeyed no more than is necessary, you'll be all right. I don't want you to stand in awe of him, or think that he's got a divine right to meddle in your life."

"I promise you I won't. James, I can write to you, but how will you write to me?"

"You'd better confide in Amelia Bonner," he said. "She'd be flattered. I can write to her and she can smuggle the letters to you."

Presently Laura went downstairs and got Grace and Mrs. Tweedle, the cook, to come up and carry down James's trunk. He was going away on a visit, she said, but they saw the marks of tears on her face and knew the truth. Mrs. Tweedle, who was especially fond of James, began to cry. Their shuffling feet, as they carried the trunk through the hall, brought Rosa out of the library, but there was no sign of Harry. Rosa, her eyes very swollen, embraced

James, and reproached him for not having given in to his father, who only wanted to do what was right. Just as he was going out of the door, Violet appeared on the stairs, looking solemn and frightened, but James ignored her. Miss Mossbanks was nowhere to be seen, not liking, perhaps, the part she had played in this affair, now that it was too late. Only Laura saw him drive away from the house where he was born, and which he was never to enter again.

As she was undressing to go to bed, after a silent and miserable dinner, Laura realized for the first time that her mother was a kind of slave, with no more power than herself. She had only a hundred and fifty pounds a year of her own, and out of this she had to buy most of her clothes, and help Violet and herself. It was useless, under the circumstances, to expect her to oppose her father, Laura reflected, and for the first time it dawned upon her what a large part economics played in the marriage relation. That peevish, irascible, bigoted man could do with them what he pleased. Only the frail and delicate James could escape—and had escaped. He might have pericarditis and intermittent fevers, but he could win victories over his father and they could not. The events of the day suddenly overwhelmed her. She put on her long-sleeved night-dress with the embroideries on collar and cuffs, and got into bed, but the emptiness of the house and of her life, now that James had gone, appalled her, and would not let her sleep. Presently she began to sob, helplessly, and then, to try and stop her tears, she got up and washed her face in the little basin she had had since she was fourteen. She went to the window and found that it was a clear moonless night, with all the stars shining. Orion burned before her eyes, undimmed by chimney pots, and she leaned further out for a better view of the Galaxy. She remembered Mr. Dowdie, and the night when he assured her the stars were merely to afford pleasure to man and remind him of God, who had hung them there. She thought of the monster Sirius, whose light, Mr. John had told her, takes nine years to reach us, and of the thousands of millions of stars in the Galaxy, only a few of which, comparatively, could be seen with the naked eye, and whose numbers could only be guessed at. The Galaxy, which contained, probably, other world systems, other universes of stars and moons and suns from any we knew. All this, an ornament for Mr. Dowdie and her father! The thought amused her. She looked down at the tops of the trees below in the square, and at the pavement directly underneath. Suppose she were to lean out further, further, and yet a little further . . . was that her only way of escape, perhaps, as she could not take James's way? And if she took it, would she miss a lot of pleasure or only a lot of pain?

She drew in her head. The thought that God had gone to all that trouble for her father and Mr. Dowdie, who very rarely looked at the stars at all for fear of sore throats, had put her in a better frame of mind.

"I must learn to laugh at things more," she said to herself. "It's only people like papa who take everything seriously."

CHAPTER V

The immediate result of James's departure was an increased enthusiasm on the part of Harry (it was a gesture of defiance) for every kind of religious observance. Morning and evening service on Sunday now became obligatory; if Violet or Laura were late for early morning prayers in the dining-room, they were kept on their knees ten minutes longer and fined a shilling. When they were all at home and by themselves in the evening—and this was the case on most evenings—Harry insisted on getting out the hymn book and singing a few old favourites before going up to bed. Rosa thumped out the accompaniments with painful inaccuracy, and Harry and the girls stood round her singing the first three verses of "Onward, Christian Soldiers," "Oh, Jesus, Thou Art Standing," and "Angels Ever Bright and Fair." If Laura's voice were not sufficiently audible, Harry would frown upon her and say, "Come, come, sing up, sing up!" Violet was the star turn. Her clear, shrill voice dominated all the others.

"We do this," Laura wrote to James, "to defy you. I can hear moral indignation in every note that papa sings."

For the first time, Laura thought seriously of marriage. She was just twenty. If she had a house of her own in London, she could see as much of James as she pleased. He could make her house his home, and she would be free of parental interference, a state of things she longed for with ever-increasing intensity. But through whom were these blessings to be brought about? In a letter she wrote to James just before going to Cowes for the summer holidays, she said;

"If a tempting offer turns up you may be sure I won't let it slide. But I can't help feeling that Violet will go off first. She really is developing into the most arch little female you ever saw. She looks the picture of girlish innocence, but I have found out that she knows *everything* and has for quite a long time. How, I can't imagine, as I shouldn't have known even now how babies were born if Mrs. Bonner hadn't reluctantly told Amelia, and Amelia hadn't told me. I've tried to talk to the child, but she has always shut up like a little oyster until the other day. Some of her ideas were very quaint, and some quite shocked me. I'm sure Miss Mossbanks didn't tell her, and I know mamma didn't, so it's all a mystery.

"We go to Cowes on Thursday. Mamma seems to think it will be quite gay, but I don't know why she thinks so. The Prince and Princess of Wales will be there, but that won't affect us much. I'm thankful Emmie Trueman will be there, because you can write to me in her care. Her father and mother have built her a little villa near them, and Willie will be home on leave during July and August. She expects the baby in September. She told me the villa has the sweetest nursery in it papered with wall-paper that has nursery rhymes by Walter Crane printed on it. It sounds too 'tweet,' and almost makes me want to have a baby myself, but I don't feel I should make a really good mother.

"I've been watching the paper for news of that aerial ship in California that we read about in May—the *Leland Stanford.* Do you remember? Somebody had built a model that they said would fly. If you hear any more, tell me, it sounded so interesting. I really do believe people will be flying some day, though of course papa scoffs at the idea.

I made him very cross the other day by reminding him that they were already using electric light in the reading rooms of the British Museum, and no one had been electrocuted yet. Do you remember how contemptuous he was about it?

"It's awful, seeing you so seldom. I'm never allowed out alone any more, and of course Miss Mossbanks and Violet can't be persuaded to walk even in the direction of Cheyne Row. Nor will mamma. It was so unsatisfactory the other day just seeing you for a few moments in Peter Robinson's. Mamma told me she never slept the night before, she was so afraid papa might chance to see us. She must think he has an all-seeing eye, like God's. I have to account to him for all my actions, and if he knew I wrote to you I would be whisked off to some horrible Pension on the Continent—where, of course I could still write, but where I could never see you at all. Thank heaven Mrs. Bonner doesn't object to your letters coming to the house. I understand her refusing to let us meet there, though it made me very angry at first. She and Mr. Bonner and papa have been friends for so many years, and of course if he discovered we were using their house as a rendezvous it would be the end of their friendship. How idiotically silly it all is! Exactly as though I were meeting a lover instead of my own dear brother and their son."

Before going to Cowes, Laura tried to distract her unhappy thoughts by interesting herself in clothes. She went with Rosa to Jay's and bought herself a yellow satin evening gown for £4.15.6. At Peter Robinson's she bought a very good day dress of cashmere trimmed with ombré, ready-made, and requiring almost no alteration, for £3.10.0. (The saleslady complimented her on her form.) She also bought, for Miss Huggins the little dressmaker to make up, twenty yards of "ponge" washing silk, which cost her one guinea, some percale for morning wear at a shilling a yard, a broché satin for a second best evening gown at two shillings and sevenpence a yard, and some Osborne lawn for warm days at sevenpence halfpenny the yard. Her summer wardrobe was then more or less complete. Violet wore almost the same dresses now that Laura did, but the child was so pretty it hardly mattered what she put on, so rather less money was spent on her. Laura was taller and had more dignity, besides being older, so her clothes required more care.

At Cowes they went into lodgings in a house near the sea kept by a gentlewoman in reduced circumstances. They were the only lodgers, but as the house was small, Laura was obliged to share a room with Violet, a thing that was not much to her taste, for she loved privacy. The girls walked a good deal, wearing, when the weather was chilly, fisherman's jerseys and tam-o'-shanters and draped or ruffled skirts. On fine days they wore the little straw sailor hats that had lately come into vogue and were so popular with ladies. Laura could swim and loved bathing, and they often took their dips from the bathing machines drawn up on the beach, and what with dressing and undressing, and re-doing of hair, this occupied the entire morning. The evenings were the worst, for then Laura was obliged to sit with Rosa, Harry, Violet, and Miss Mossbanks in the sitting-room around the paraffin lamp while Harry read aloud either from some religious work or from a book of travel. Sometimes Laura escaped and spent the evening with Emmie Trueman, a pretty little fair thing, very small and round, and now that she was seven months along, almost as broad as she was long. But that was only when Emmie's sailor husband went out, for it was not considered quite the thing for Willie, and Laura, an unmarried girl, to be in the same room with Emmie when her condition was so obvious. Alone, the two girls discussed matrimony, husbands and babies pretty freely. There was not much else for them to talk about, as Emmie had very little in her head, and was interested in nothing that had not to do with herself, her home and her condition.

One unlucky afternoon, Laura took Violet to call on Emmie. Violet was very curious about her, as she had never before known anyone who was going to have a baby, and she hoped the two older girls would treat her as an equal and talk freely and confidentially before her. But Emmie, who was lying down in her bedroom, wanted to talk to Laura alone, and asked Violet to run downstairs for a moment. The moment lengthened into half an hour, the half hour into three quarters. It was no fault of Laura's; Emmie was capricious and must be given in to, and she clearly didn't wish to see Violet.

"Go down," Emmie said at last, "and see if Willie's come in yet. I thought I heard him. He's been racing, and I want to know if his boat won."

Laura ran lightly down the stairs and looked through the door of the drawing-room. The sight that met her eyes sent her flying noiselessly half-way up the stairs again, her hands over her heart. Violet was in Willie's arms, and he was kissing her. The thing was unbelievable. Violet! How could she? How had it happened? How could such a thing have happened? It couldn't be true! It *was* true! Emmie's young husband, who adored her. And they had only been married a year. And Violet, to Laura's knowledge, had never seen him before except at his wedding. She went slowly down to the drawing-room again, her knees trembling so that she could hardly walk. Willie must have been just inside the door, for she heard him say perfectly distinctly;

"Good Lord! And you haven't even got your hair up yet! No, that's enough! You'd better run up to your sister now. Or you stay here and I'll go up."

He came out of the room, a pleasant-looking, sunburned young man, but at the moment looking flushed and perturbed. He was wearing flannels, and his yachting cap lay on the hall table. He started at the sight of Laura.

"Hello, Miss Deverell. I was just coming up to tell Emmie I was back. Your young sister has been entertaining me. She said you and Emmie wanted to talk by yourselves."

"Emmie asked me to come down and find you," Laura said, her heart thumping wildly. "It's time for us to go home now."

Violet came out of the drawing-room on hearing her voice.

"Is it time to go? I'd better go up and say good-bye to Emmie, then. Or perhaps she'd rather I didn't."

Laura told her to go up, and she passed them and ran up the stairs, an angelic little creature, all blue and gold. Left face to face with young Trueman, Laura hardly knew what to say or how to act.

"You've never seen my sister before, have you?" she asked, averting troubled eyes.

"Not that I remember. Pretty child, isn't she? She seemed upset when I came in. She said everybody hated her and nobody wanted to talk to her. In fact she began to cry as soon as I saw her. Her feelings had been hurt in some way, I dare say."

"Violet is a little difficult," Laura said, and her face grew hot.

"She'll have the young men after her like flies about a honey-pot soon," he said. Then, as Laura made no reply, "How are you enjoying Cowes?"

Laura found the situation a puzzling one. Should she say anything, or was it better not to? Ought she to show him she knew, or pretend ignorance? But her shyness settled the matter for her. She could say nothing. She answered his question and asked him about the day's sailing. Then Violet came down, and they said good-bye, and he walked with them as far as the gate, Violet behaving exactly as though the incredible thing Laura had seen had not happened. The two girls walked quickly toward home without speaking.

"I think we're going to have a lovely sunset," said Violet at last, lifting her eyes to a reddish glow on the rather sullen clouds. Laura said nothing, and presently she burst out, "Oh, whatever's the matter? You won't talk, or look at anything, I think you're hateful. You'd better walk by yourself."

She flounced along resentfully at Laura's side.

"Violet," said Laura very gently, speaking at last, "I'm very fond of you; you're my little sister, and I really do love you, though you often irritate and annoy me, as I expect I irritate and annoy you. But after what I saw this afternoon, I almost feel I never want to see you or speak to you again."

Violet stared in well-simulated amazement, and the colour flooded her cheeks.

"Laura! Whatever do you mean? What on earth have I done to-day I'd like to know?"

"Please don't pretend. When I came downstairs this afternoon to tell Willie that Emmie wanted him, I looked into the drawing-room and saw you in his arms. He was kissing you. I'll never forget the shock it gave me as long as I live. If I hadn't seen it myself I never would have believed it. It's too dreadful to be true, but it *is* true. It *did* happen. I saw it."

Violet gasped and stammered.

"You saw . . . ? Oh, Laura. . . Oh, well don't make such a fuss. I couldn't help it. It wasn't my fault, not one bit. It had nothing to do with me. It just happened."

"Don't fib to me. That only makes it worse. I can always tell when you're fibbing. I ought to call it lying."

"Well, I'm not lying, so there. I'll tell you just what it was. It was all your fault. You and Emmie were so horrid to me, sending me out of that room as though I was five—"

"I didn't send you, and Emmie didn't mean to be unkind. She wasn't feeling very well."

"Well, anyway, you hurt my feelings, very much." She began to cry a little. "So then I came downstairs and I cried, and while I was crying and thinking how unkind and horrid you were to me Emmie's husband came in, and he was sorry for me. So I told him just how I felt and how mean you were, and he kept telling me not to cry and not to spoil my pretty blue eyes, because I was much too pretty to cry, and the first thing I knew he'd kissed me. And then I said he mustn't, and I made him stop. That was all it was. You're always hating me for something that isn't my fault."

Laura remembered Willie Trueman's, "Good Lord! And you haven't even got your hair up. No, that's enough."

"Is that the whole truth, Violet?"

"It's the whole truth as God sees me."

"Hush! That doesn't impress me. I suppose it's as near the truth as I'll ever get, unless I ask Willie Trueman himself."

"Well, you needn't be so goody-goody. If I do lie sometimes, I learnt how to from you. And I've never deceived papa and mamma as you have. I wouldn't do it. I'd be ashamed. So don't you pretend to be so good. I should think that if I did something I didn't want to tell about you'd be the last person to try to stop me after what you and James did."

Laura felt as though she were trying to catch an eel and make it stand upright.

"Violet, this is different. A married man . . . and Emmie's husband, and Emmie going to have a baby, and—Oh, what will he think of you? You let him kiss you, a perfect stranger, almost. You encouraged him to by crying, and asking for pity."

"Well, it hasn't hurt Emmie, has it? Who's going to tell her?"

Laura looked at her sister with tightened lips.

"I don't know what will become of you, Violet. I really don't."

Violet pouted, secretly pleased at having shocked her elder sister. She swung her shoulders childishly as she walked.

"Just because men like me better than they do you—"

"Violet! You little horror! Be quiet! How can you talk like that? Haven't you any sense of shame?"

"I expect I've just as much as you have. I know you and James used to hide books in that cupboard in James's room. You thought I didn't know and I did. And I never told."

"I don't care whether you know or not," said Laura fiercely, "you may tell if you like. There was nothing there

I'm ashamed of. Don't you see the difference between—"

"No, I don't. So there. And if men make me kiss them, what can I do? I never thought an officer in the King's Navy would behave so to a young girl, but he did, and I don't see why I should be blamed for it. So there."

Laura made no reply to this. She felt helpless. It seemed impossible to make her realize the enormity of her conduct. As they reached the house, Violet said;

"Are you going to tell papa?"

"Certainly not," answered Laura. "Papa and I are not on confidential terms."

"Will you tell mamma, then?"

"No. If I can't make you see how vilely you've behaved, I'm sure mamma can't. But I may tell Willie Trueman what I think about it."

"I just wish you would," said Violet, as they rang the bell. "He had no business to do what he did." She pouted, and let her lovely lashes fall over her eyes.

Laura was more than ever convinced that she must get away from her family. Far from being a good influence for Violet, she believed that once she was out of the way, and married, Violet, on becoming Miss Deverell, would feel a greater sense of dignity and responsibility. She hated being a younger sister, was perpetually trying to draw attention to herself, and resented the prerogatives that, as the elder, were naturally Laura's. And more than anything else she hated saying a silly thing in Laura's presence, though Laura neither teased nor scolded her for it. And that evening at dinner this happened and led to a little scene.

Excavations were under way at Brading in the Isle of Wight, and the excavators had just brought to light the remains of a Roman villa. Miss Mossbanks, who loved topics of this sort, spoke about it at dinner.

"Mamma," said Violet, puzzled by all this activity with pick and shovel, "why did the Romans always live underground?"

Miss Mossbanks flushed scarlet. This ignorance reflected immediately upon her. She upbraided Violet warmly, and for some minutes acted like a hen that had been rudely flung off the nest. Harry presently told her she had said enough. Violet had merely spoken without thinking, as anyone might do, and he was quite satisfied with his little daughter. She was a well-behaved, God-fearing little girl—"And not so little, either," he said, playfully pinching her cheek—and that was all he required of her sex.

"We all know," he said, "where too many brains are apt to lead even members of the stronger sex. Into self-glorification, lack of faith, evil-thinking, moral degradation and general ungodliness. We do not want any more of that in this family."

In spite of her determination never to reply to her father when he talked provocatively, Laura flared up at this.

"The only one of your children who seems at all likely to give you cause for pride is the one you are referring to in that cruel way. James at least will make his mark in the world."

Harry turned upon her a face of hypocritical politeness and geniality. He smiled upon her, most agreeably.

"That is your opinion, is it? Well, let me tell you this, my dear young lady. There are all sorts of marks, and some are dirty. Some are even bloody. That young man who murdered the old woman in London the other day and hid her body in a trunk has made his mark."

As this nauseating observation reached her ears it seemed to Laura as though the walls of the sitting-room rushed upon her to enclose her. She felt suffocated, by her father, her mother, Violet, Miss Mossbanks, and by the miasma of foggy thoughts and ideas that seemed to emanate from them, poisoning the air. She lifted her hands as though to push something away. She got up from the table, her eyes swimming with tears of misery and despair.

"I can't stand this," she cried out, and hurried away, up to her room. There she pulled up a chair and sat by the open window, her elbows on the sill.

If, in Mr. John's house, there were only another bedroom, another bed, she would go there, and try to earn her living as a daily governess. But there was no room for her, not a possible corner. He had lately taken in a boy named Cedric Jackson, whom he had once tutored in Cumberland. The boy was very poor, and Mr. John had happened upon him, after ten years, half starved in the street. James's letters were now full of this young poet and mystic, and the two had become great friends, though their opinions, she gathered, differed widely. She could have been bitterly jealous of this boy had she not been so thankful that James had at last found someone of his own age and tastes. Where could she go, then, what could she do? Some free and defiant gesture was needed, and there was none that she could make. She could perhaps find work as a daily governess, but she doubted her fitness for it and was certain of her distaste. A governess who lived with the family got from thirty-five to forty pounds a year, and she might have to listen to someone who was a replica of her father, or worse, day after day, year after year. No, she wouldn't consider it. Better a plunge from her bedroom window in London to the pavement. A daily governess might get as much as fourteen shillings a day, which would mean, if she worked every day, about four pounds a week, but that didn't allow for illnesses and for holidays, when there were no children to teach. Still, it was a possibility, and she would write to Mrs. Lovelace, and ask what she thought about it, and if she knew of a room near at hand. Naturally, what she wanted was marriage, but she might not find anyone she wanted to marry for years. Mrs. Bonner hadn't married till she was thirty, a middle-aged woman, almost. Ten more years of her father. . .

But youth is resilient, and the next day she resolved to try one more winter with her family. She would be going to dances, at any one of which she might meet someone she liked. She would go on for another six months, and then see. It couldn't be worse than the last six months had been. And then, two days later, as if in answer to a prayer, came a letter from Olga inviting her to Scotland for two weeks in the latter part of August, for a shooting party. The heiress generously enclosed a cheque for the railway fare. Laura was transported, her good fortune seemed to her astonishing, and her whole outlook on life underwent a change. It would be her first house-party, her first visit to Scotland, her first visit alone anywhere, her first adventure into life as an adult.

"Oh, mamma!" she cried, always ready to be on good terms with her mother, "I feel my life has taken a turn for the better at last."

The journey to Scotland, alone, required some thinking over. The Merton-Stuarts were already there, and there was no one that Rosa and Harry could think of likely to be going at the same time. It was finally arranged that Miss Mossbanks—who hated the sea-trip between the island and the mainland—should accompany her as far as Southampton, and that Grace the parlourmaid who had already had her holidays and was back in Kensington Square, should put her on the train to Scotland the following evening. As Laura had a little shopping to do and anyway wished to break the journey, she had decided to spend one night in London. When she was ready to leave the house, Harry drew her aside and said;

"Of course you are on your honour not to see a certain person in London. You understand that."

"Do you mean James?" inquired Laura, hating his way of alluding to her brother.

"You know very well who I mean. Do you clearly understand that you are not to see him or hold any communication with him?"

"Papa," said Laura, "suppose James were ill, or even dying, would you still insist . . . ?"

"I intend to suppose nothing. Have you understood my orders?"

It was not too late for him to prevent her going, and she knew it. Promises made under duress had little value—and such silly promises!

"I quite understand."

"I have your promise that you will not attempt to see him?"

"Yes."

"Very well. I hope you may enjoy your visit. Either Miss Mossbanks or I will meet you in Southampton on your return. My very kind regards to your Aunt Susan and to your Uncle Robert." He added, a little wistfully, she thought, "I hope the sport is good. It is many years since I have shot a grouse."

Laura wondered afterwards if her father would have been a pleasanter man if things had turned out more favourably for him. He ought to have been a country gentleman, with an estate and good shooting and a good stable. It suddenly struck her that he was a disappointed man and probably an envious one.

"Anyway, I shall see James as soon as ever I can," she said to herself. "It isn't papa's money, thank heaven, that I'm spending on this trip."

There was a high wind that day, and Miss Mossbanks was most distressingly ill on the boat. Laura felt very sorry for her, and made her drink some brandy before she faced the return journey. She waved her hand in good-bye as she left her but saw no answering smile on that unhappy face.

"There, but for the Grace of God, will go I," she thought, recalling her resolve, a few days earlier, to leave home and try to find work in London.

The house in Kensington Square was ghostly in white dust-covers. The chandeliers were in great bags, and the only room that looked habitable was her own bedroom. Laura was very fond of the house and she appreciated—more than ever, perhaps, because of what she had just left—its beauties and its perfect proportions. If only her mother had better taste! Those bead curtains for instance, were dreadful, and the colours in the rooms deplorable. Rosa's own room was done in green and pink—a horrid, heavy green, and a crude, bright pink. And the drawing-room was Delft blue—to match the plates—and Pompeian red, and had a Turkish cosy corner in it which all Rosa's contemporaries thought too delightful. Ferns, aspidistras and rubber plants were everywhere, and it took one maid a whole morning to water them. Laura longed for simple, white rooms and cut flowers instead of plants. Rooms fit to hang Whistler paintings in, she thought, for Whistler was still her idol.

Young ladies were rarely seen in the streets unaccompanied and Laura had promised Rosa to take Grace with her when she went out, but she thought she might as well break two promises as one, and went alone to see James as soon as she had rested and tidied herself. She had advised him by postcard—that ten years old innovation once thought so vulgar—and he was waiting for her and opened the door.

"Oh, James, at last! I've had to lie and break promises, but at last I've got here."

She found James different, more sure of himself, less fragile-looking.

"Laura," he said, "I thank my stars every day that I had that row with papa. I might never have got away otherwise, and I'm so happy here." He led her into the study and showed her the writing table at which he worked. Mr. John had no particular use for it now, preferring to read or write in the sitting-room upstairs.

"I wrote you that I was reviewing books for *Mary's Journal,*" he said. "As a magazine, it's the last of fly time, but they pay me for it, and it's a beginning at least."

Laura was amused at hearing him use an expression that was a favourite one of Olga's.

"And where does Cedric Jackson work?"

"Up in his bedroom. He prefers it. He's coming down in a few minutes. I want you to meet him. Look here, before he comes, I'd like you to read some of his poems—'Lux Mundi,' and 'They Cry to Heaven.' I think they're very good, but you must say what you think."

He took two pages of beautifully written script out of a drawer and put them into her hands.

"Must he come down just yet?" Laura asked. "There's such a lot I want to talk to you about still."

"Well, I want you to meet him. We're very good friends now. When I hear Cedric talk I realize there's something to be said for the mystic point of view—but not much. All the same, a poet who is also a mystic has an enormous advantage, in a way, over a poet who is an agnostic. But I couldn't be a mystic if I tried for ever. Cedric can see mystical beauty in an onion. Read 'Lux Mundi' first."

Laura read it.

"I like it. It reminds me a little of that new poet, Bogue, David Bogue, who wrote 'Charmides.' "

"Oscar Wilde is his real name. Most people know that now. Yes, there is a kind of resemblance. What did you think of 'Charmides?' "

"Oh, it is beautiful! I loved it. Olga lent it to me, but I was so afraid papa might see it and make a fuss that I didn't keep it long. I want to read it again."

"The critics made fun of it, of course," said James. "They seem to hate him. They say he sails too near the wind. What's wrong with the wind I'd like to know, if you know how to sail? And one critic said his poems were of too warm a character. It sounds almost like papa. I think he's a coming man, though he may never be a great poet. But there are some lines in these poems of Cedric's that convince me he's got the genuine poetic mind. He's simpler and has more real feeling than Wilde, and his images are less self-conscious and far-fetched."

"What about your poems? Can't I see them?"

"No, not yet, not for some time. I'll send them to you when I've written some I really like. You haven't read, 'They Cry to Heaven' yet."

Laura bent her head over it obediently.

"Yes, there are some lovely lines in that. It's very good.

But, James, don't admire Cedric's work so much that you see nothing good in your own."

"Don't worry. I'm constantly on the look-out for good in my own. You'll know when I've found it."

She asked about his health.

"I think I'm better. Away from constant irritation and friction I'll get better all the time, I expect. I had a temperature of 104 for three days last week, but I got over it. Mrs. Lovelace was nearly frightened to death. My chief worry now is clothes. I give everything I earn to Mrs. Lovelace to help pay for my board, for I won't live on charity, but where money for clothes is to come from I don't know. Look at my elbows."

Laura saw that they were carefully darned, and that there were darned places everywhere.

"James! That's awful. What are we to do? Will you let me give you enough from my allowance to buy you a new suit? You must. I'll manage somehow."

But he refused to listen to such a proposal. Looking at him, Laura thought that in spite of his shabbiness, he had improved very much. His pallor was less transparent, his thick, dark hair was more carefully brushed and tended, his eyes looked clearer, livelier, brighter than before. Adolescence, with its unlovely symptoms, was passing. He was coming out like a negative in a chemical bath.

Mystic and dreamer Cedric might be, but Laura thought his face had not the sweetness and beauty of James's. It was a curious face, the forehead high and narrow, the chin small and weak-looking, but his grey eyes were startling in their intensity. His manner was perfectly simple, almost childish, and he talked as naturally and easily to Laura as if he had known her a lifetime. She began by wondering what James saw in him and ended by liking him. She had never seen a painting of El Greco's then, but when she did, and became familiar with the faces of El Greco's saints and angels, she knew that a face of the same type as Cedric's must have attracted the painter's eye.

Watching Cedric and James together, she felt all the pain of the one outside, at the same time telling herself that she had no right to feel it. But here, undoubtedly, was James's natural companion, a young man with whom he had everything in common. Both heartily disliked the idea of moving with the herd; both hated hypocrisy, bigotry, smugness, stupidity. Both would sacrifice much to an ideal, to the cause of truth, both sought for a kind of sanity in things, both longed to express as perfectly as possible that vision of the truth that was in them.

("I would rather produce one beautiful line of poetry," James said that evening, "than ten worthy citizens.")

Mr. John and Mrs. Lovelace congratulated Laura on having obtained this short respite from family life, and hoped it was only the beginning of a greater freedom. Laura said she doubted it, unless she could find a husband for herself in Scotland. She flushed as she said it, and flushed still more at finding James's grave watchful eyes on her.

"You needn't look at me so reproachfully, James. You'd look for a husband too if you were in my position."

"I wasn't looking reproachfully," he said, "only sadly."

"Husbands," remarked Mrs. Lovelace, "can be tyrants too, especially if they hold the purse-strings."

"I know," answered Laura, "but I wouldn't marry a tyrant."

"They're not tyrants until you marry them," said Mr. John. "Though I can't imagine any man in his senses not giving Laura everything she wanted if he had it to give."

"Dear Mr. John," she murmured, smiling at him.

James teased her a little about the shooting party she was going to, where she would have to witness the slaughter of hundreds of lovely brown birds. Like nearly all people whose mental robustness is greater than their physical, James hated any sort of killing.

"Ah, don't spoil it for me, James. I don't like that part either, but I do so want to enjoy myself."

James and Cedric took her home that evening, James going no further than the corner of the square because he said he didn't want to look at the house where he had been so miserable, and when Grace came to the door she saw Laura with a strange man.

"Well, miss," said Grace, as she closed the door, "I'm sure I don't know what your papa'd say."

"What my father would say, Grace," Laura replied, "is none of our business. And there's no reason why he should know."

The next day she lunched with James in a cheap little restaurant in the King's Road. It was the first time Laura had ever been in a restaurant, and she thought the experience delightful. She insisted on paying the bill, which came to three shillings for the two. That evening Grace put her on the train for Scotland.

New experiences were crowding upon Laura now. She was to spend her first night on a train, and she inspected the sleeping arrangements with the liveliest interest. It all seemed unbelievably comfortable and nice, and her little compartment was most ingeniously fitted up. She had with her a basket containing plenty of sandwiches and hard-boiled eggs, for she didn't like the idea of trying to get meals in the station restaurants with one eye on the clock. Grace, as she left her, said;

"Well, miss, I'm glad it's you and not me that's going. I shall be sleeping safe in my bed tonight, and very thankful, I'm sure."

Laura slept at intervals that night, and when she was awake rather enjoyed, than otherwise, the feeling of being carried headlong through space. This first journey alone, marked, she felt sure, a turning point in her life. She felt detached, a little free floating particle to which anything might happen. It seemed impossible that she should take up her old life again precisely where she had left it off.

"James exists," she thought, "but perhaps I've only dreamt papa and mamma and Violet, and all that about a house in Kensington Square. Papa especially seems like a grotesque shadow on a wall. I see now why people love to travel. They shed things, they shed people, they shed old ideas. I am shedding something with every mile of this journey."

She slept a broken sleep till daylight, and then lay awake to watch the contours of a strange country that was yet as familiar to her in story and history and song as her own. Later she dressed and ate some sandwiches and an egg, and saw the fine mist blur the windows, and the grey clouds lean down to the very tree-tops.

She was beginning to feel hungry again when the train stopped at the small station with the long name for which she had been watching for the past hour. She bundled herself out into the chill, fresh air, and hurried along the platform to see that her trunk was taken out of the luggage van. It was already on the platform, that old tin trunk marked L. A. D. that she had had since she was ten years old, and had for so long shared with Violet. The train moved off, and a bearded person in gaiters and carrying a long whip came up to her and asked if she were for

Dunochty Hall. She said she was, and just then a voice behind her said, "So am I. I hope there's room for us both."

She turned and saw a smiling man in tweeds. He had a brown moustache, small brown sidewhiskers and very lively brown eyes. He was holding a deerstalker hat in one hand and he held out the other to her.

"My name is Horace Leighton," he said. "I expect you are the Miss Deverell I was told would be on this train."

"I am," said Laura, shaking hands with him. "They didn't tell me there would be anyone else." "Now why did I say that?" she immediately wondered. "It sounds as though I were displeased."

She observed that a valet was collecting the several pieces of luggage that belonged to him, including a somewhat worn guncase. Mr. Leighton pointed to Laura's trunk.

"Tell the porter to bring this young lady's box, and here is her travelling case." It was handed over to the valet, a gloomy looking person in black clothes. "Now, we'll go out and find the carriage."

They followed the coachman outside and found two vehicles awaiting them; a farm cart for the luggage, and for themselves a large, old-fashioned carriage drawn by a pair of shaggy horses. A ragged little boy was holding their heads, and Mr. Leighton gave him a shilling, whereupon he turned cartwheels in the road, to Laura's amusement. She and Mr. Leighton got inside, and the valet on the box with the driver. Then they started, Laura feeling very nervous at the prospect of a long drive with a perfect stranger, of whom she knew nothing and to whom she did not know what to say.

But Mr. Leighton was entirely at his ease and knew how to put Laura at hers. He plied her at once with questions of a most personal nature, and all in the most frivolous and amusing manner.

"We will be in this carriage," he said, "for an hour and a half, so let us make the most of our time."

He wished to know if she were engaged, in love, if she had ever been in love, if she liked young men, and if so, how much; if she had brothers and sisters, who her father was, and if by chance she were related to old General Deverell (Devil Deverell he was called, she learnt for the first time) whom his father had known quite well.

"He was passionate, hot-tempered and very hard to please," said Mr. Leighton, "and used to raise—well, a terrible rumpus if he didn't get his way. And I expect you resemble him in every respect."

"Perhaps in some," said Laura, greatly enjoying this encounter. "I'm glad I had a grandfather who was a devil, for my parents are dreadfully virtuous. He did something that displeased them very much, and that is all I know. I think it was something to do with a will."

"That is one of the very best known ways of displeasing people," said Mr. Leighton, "to make a will. So you admit you take after your grandfather? I expect you are a tremendous flirt, then, for I have heard that he was."

Laura had never before encountered such free and frank bonhomie and she found it delightful.

"I don't know whether I'm a flirt or not. I expect I could be if I wanted to."

"Well," said Mr. Leighton, "at the end of two weeks I shall have found out all your secrets."

"And shall I know yours?"

"I have none. My life is an open book."

"Let me see how open. Have you a wife? Have you children? Are you in love? Do you—"

"One at a time! I am a bachelor, of thirty-nine. That is all there is to tell."

"When I'm thirty-nine," said Laura, "I hope there'll be more than that to tell."

"If you like, I will make it my business to see that there is."

"You are too kind," she murmured, glancing at him with a coquetry she hardly knew she possessed.

His person was sharply pleasing to her, as though he conformed to some ideal pattern mysteriously implanted in her mind. He had a round, well proportioned head—James had taught her to look at heads—and a wide forehead upon which the hair did not encroach too far. His side-whiskers were trimmed down almost to disappearing point, and his moustache was small and brushed away from a mouth whose expression was agreeable and smiling, if somewhat mischievous. His deerstalker hat suited him, as did the tweeds he wore, and he had wrapped about him in the carriage a big Inverness cape of rough, greenish frieze, for the day was chilly. Laura, in her cashmere dress trimmed with ombré, with only a little cape about her shoulders, felt cold, and drew the rug closer, whereupon he immediately tucked it round her with exaggerated solicitude. His eyes brimmed with vitality and mischief.

"Don't let me hear you complain that I haven't taken care of you. If you catch cold, don't dare to say it was my fault." He sat closer to her, as though he wished to keep her warm with his own body.

There was something about him that was vital, warm, masculine. She couldn't help feeling it and being stirred by it, and she guessed that he wished her to feel it. The blood rose to her cheeks, and her eyes sparkled. All this was intoxicatingly new and delightful. Through the open window came the scent of pines, of damp earth, of heather, and they mingled agreeably with the odour of tobacco and of some pleasantly smelling liquid that he had put on his hair.

"Have you known Olga long?" she asked. Surely, she thought, he must be in love with the pretty, sprightly heiress.

"I've known Olga since she was three days old," he answered. "My parents knew hers very well, and when I was twenty I was taken by them to inquire after the health of her mother, and inspect the infant. I have often wanted to spank her, but never more than then, for she screamed the whole time. However, I am her godfather, and she looks upon me as an aged and trusty friend. I hope you will agree that I am both."

"I don't know how trusty you are," Laura said. "It's rather soon to express an opinion."

"Now that is naughty of you." She had to make herself look away, his eyes so caught and held hers, with their brown mischief. Certainly he was a flirt, certainly he was a tease, but how pleasant to be teased and flirted with. Already she was thinking, "Is it possible? Could he fall in love with me? If he did, I know I should fall in love with him."

She marshalled, for swift review, all the men she had danced with and talked to since she came out. Little gentlemen, for the most part, who made polite conversation, danced with her, consulted her feelings before attempting to reverse (some ladies didn't care for it), fanned her, fetched her ices and cakes, and if they led other lives than those they showed to maidens like herself, kept them admirably concealed. Only Olga seemed to have the trick of penetrating that polite and boring exterior to the essential male, but she penetrated too far as a rule and found the essential animal—and then retreated with naughty coyness. Laura was not afraid of the animal; that, she knew, existed also in herself; but she wanted it to look through the eyes of a man of intelligence and character, not through the eyes of an over-heated subaltern.

"Oh, my dear!" she had sometimes heard Olga say, "If I told you what Mr. Hepplethwaite said to me . . . really, he is beyond the limit. How he dared! Promise you'll never breathe it to a soul? Well, then . . ."

"What are you thinking about?"

"I was thinking how hungry I was."

"Oh, poor child! There are sandwiches here—no, my man has them. You shall eat them." He put his head out of the window, but she touched his arm.

"I have some of my own left. I'd forgotten them."

Mr. Leighton wasn't hungry. He preferred to wait for the late lunch they would have when they arrived between two and three.

"When I was your age," he said in his teasing way, "I was always hungry too."

"I'm twenty," Laura answered. "I was twenty in May. That's not so very young. I can remember the time when Napoleon the Third was Emperor of France."

"I'm nearly nineteen years older than you are. Think of it!"

"I'm sorry I'm so disgustingly young."

"How charming of you! You might so easily have said, 'I'm sorry you're so disgustingly old.'"

"At what age do you like us best?" she asked, taking the shell off a hard-boiled egg with some difficulty, as the carriage jolted on the uneven roads.

"At twenty, of course."

"Then next year you'll have to like me a little less."

"Next year twenty-one will be my favourite age."

"You must have spent your life in saying pretty things to women," Laura remarked. "You do it so nicely." She added, "I hope they all enjoyed it as much as I'm enjoying it."

"Are you enjoying it? What a darling to say that! It makes me long to say hundreds more. And I could say them to you so easily."

"Do you know," she said, "I never knew people talked like this before."

"You never knew . . . ?"

"I mean, nice nonsense like this. All the young men I've ever met were solemn or shy or stupid, and I was usually all three. I thought one had to be engaged to a man or even married before one could talk naturally with him."

"You charming creature! Did you really think that? I talk naturally to everyone, whether they like it or not." He laughed. "They usually do."

"I expect they do, I know that I do. Were you brought up with a great many brothers and sisters?"

"I have only one sister, and no brothers. She is a good soul and unmarried. She interests herself in charities. She has just started a home for disabled horses."

"Oh, what a good thing!" Laura exclaimed. "I think animals have as much right to care and happiness as we have."

"Well," said Mr. Leighton, "there's a society, you know, for the prevention of cruelty to animals—there has been one for many years—but there's nothing at all for the prevention of cruelty to children, though I hear they're trying to start one in Birmingham. They started the first one in America last year."

"Yes, that's odd," agreed Laura. "There ought to be a society for that, of course. But I do like to think that dear old horses that have worked hard all their lives have a nice comfortable place to go to in their old age. When we're looking after people we're looking after ourselves, in a way. When we look after animals we're doing something even nicer, I think, though of course no more necessary. I suppose it's wrong of me, but animal suffering often seems to me more pathetic and dreadful than human suffering, unless, of course, it's someone I love."

But he would not be serious for long.

"Someone you love. I feel jealous pains shoot through me when you say that."

"When I said that," Laura told him, "I was thinking of my brother."

"I breathe again."

"I shall never love anyone as much as I love my brother."

"I would like to bet with you that you will find that to be untrue before the year is out."

"Well, then, you'd certainly lose."

"Are you so sure? Will you bet?"

"No, I won't bet," said Laura, colouring, "but I know."

"How can you know? Have you tried?"

"No. I haven't seen anyone I wanted to try with."

"Never?" He brought his teasing, lively eyes close to hers. "Never?"

"No, never." She returned his look steadily.

"May I predict that you soon will?"

"How can you predict anything about me? You don't know me."

"That is a state of affairs I hope time will mend."

"He is going very fast," thought Laura. "I suppose this is what they call flirting." She withdrew a little into her corner, and smiling at him said, "Well, we have two weeks ahead of us. There's nothing to prevent it, I suppose. But please tell me what it's like at Dunochty Hall. You've been before, so you can describe it to me."

He said that he had stayed there the previous year, but that he expected to enjoy it much more this year. As for what it was like, it wasn't very different from a great many other places of its kind. It was quite comfortable, the servants were good, the country delightful, the shooting first rate, and the Merton-Stuarts always did one very well. As for the guests, there would be, as far as he knew, Lady Salpepper and her daughter Emily—Laura made a little grimace at this; she had met them at the Merton-Stuarts' dance, and they were the sort of people she couldn't bear; starchy, cold, boring, correct; they looked at one as if to say, "Who on earth are you?" Mr. Leighton agreed, but said they were in reality quite harmless and very hard up. Lady Salpepper was doing her best to marry Emily to a rich young man, and she wasn't going to find it easy. Then there would be Mortimer Rich—Morty Rich, he was called—the best shot in England, an old bachelor of sixty-odd with about twenty-five thousand a year. He was most amusing in his way, and cared only for gossip, good food and shooting. Then there were the Lockyers; Colonel Lockyer of the Buffs and his wife. She was considered by many people to be the most beautiful woman in London, next to Lily Langtry. She was presented at the same Court, and when people were convinced there could be no lovelier creature than the Jersey Lily, they turned and saw Grace Bendishe, as she was then, and weren't so sure. She also had found much favour with a certain person very high in the land, and there was a good deal of talk, but Colonel Lockyer took no notice of it. The Colonel was related to Sir Robert Merton-Stuart, a cousin, Mr. Leighton believed, though perhaps not a first cousin. He, too, was a very good shot, and a great gambler besides. He had been seen to lose thousands at White's without turning a hair. Then there would be the usual two or three young men for Olga, and for Emily Salpepper.

"And for me, I should hope," said Laura.

"Certainly not. I am here for you. Let that be clearly understood."

It was amusing, Laura thought, to be talked to like this, to be teased, questioned, flirted with so ably and with such masculine assurance. She didn't feel at all shy with him, she only felt a desire to hold back a little, to prevent him from going too fast.

"Then you'd better tell me more about yourself," she said. "What do you do, besides shoot?"

"Guess what I do."

She guessed that he was in the Army, the Navy, the Church—though it couldn't, of course, be the Church—but they were all wrong. Then he was a writer, a professor, a banker, an inventor, a scientist, a philosopher, a musician, an artist. To all these he shook his head.

"There's really nothing left," she said. He must be simply a gentleman of leisure. No, he wasn't that either.

"Then tell me," she said, "for I can't think of anything else."

He leaned toward her and whispered, with exaggerated solemnity, *"I am in trade."*

"Oh, I never thought of that. How stupid of me!"

"Why should you have thought of it? No one expects a —well, shall we say it?—a gentleman, to be in trade. It is practically a contradiction in terms. Eton and Oxford are not supposed to lead to the factory or the market place. Still, the fact remains, I am in trade."

"I don't see why you shouldn't be. What sort of trade is it?"

"I'm a manufacturer. My father, who was a very shrewd and far-sighted old gentleman, bought a certain business as an investment shortly before his death, and turned it over to me. I was in the House of Commons as Member for Uxbridge at the time, but soon after there came a general election, the Liberals got in with a big majority, and I lost my seat. Then I took over the entire control of the factory. It is now three times the size, and is a very flourishing company. Sir Robert is one of my directors, Lockyer is another."

"A factory? What do you make?"

"Look," he said, "we've come to the prettiest part of the journey. I'll tell you more about the factory another time."

The fine rain had stopped, the air that came through the open windows of the landau was mild and full of delicious odours. They saw thickset woods of dark pines; little foaming, tumbling gills, brown and swollen with the rain, the sound of whose flurry reached their ears above the noise of the wheels; deep gullies; stretches of heather in full flower; piled-up rocks; bogs, emerald green with moss; grassy slopes where sheep fed, their bells tinkling with a lovely, lonely sound; coveys of grouse rising with throaty, monosyllabic notes and flying low over the heather and settling again. All this charmed and delighted Laura who had seen nothing like it, and to whom lovely scenery was a heady excitement She looked out of the window, her eyes bright with pleasure, and seemed to forget her companion except when she threw him an exclamation from time to time. "Oh, how lovely! How beautiful this is!"

They turned a corner and came upon another view, where, at the top of a wooded slope, looking out over miles of moor, lay the long grey castellated form of Dunochty Hall, pleasing and romantic at a distance, but ugly on a nearer view, for it was a bad imitation of a feudal castle, built in the eighteen forties, and could fool no one at a distance of less than a mile.

"There is the hospitable roof," said Mr. Leighton, "that for two heaven-sent weeks will have the felicity of sheltering us both."

"And a great many other people besides," said Laura. "I hope they feed us at once. I'm very hungry again. Do I look tidy?"

She straightened her hat, tucked away some loose strands of hair that had escaped from under it, and smoothed her dress.

"You don't look in the least as though you had travelled all night. You look perfect."

"Oh, no, I know that isn't true. I expect I shall feel ashamed of my clothes among all those smart people, but it can't be helped. I'm lucky to be here at all."

Smiling, he looked with open and undisguised satisfaction at her serene and youthful face, with its wide forehead and pointed chin, its unconsciously inviting mouth and slightly oblique blue eyes.

"Be kind to me," he said, in a low voice. "Will you?"

"Kind?" Her heart beat wildly, but she betrayed nothing. "Of course. Why would I be unkind?"

"To be kind, you must be kinder to me than to anyone else. Much kinder."

He took her hand and kissed it and dropped it again. He saw her dark skin flush, but she made no reply, and as the carriage stopped she gathered her cape about her with a little dignified movement, and waited for him to get out first.

CHAPTER VI

The guests were scattered by the time they arrived at half past two, but Olga and Lady Merton-Stuart were waiting for them. Olga was sitting cross-legged on the sofa, her skirts concealing, so far as was possible, the impropriety of her position, while she strummed on a guitar, a new toy. Lady Merton-Stuart was busy with the advertisement pages of the *Times*, for, she explained to them as she put it down, one of the footmen in London had just given notice. Olga greeted Laura affectionately, and welcomed Horace Leighton with;

"Horace, you muff, why didn't you send me that song I asked for?"

"I brought it with me," he said.

"Oh, it's too late now. I wanted it last week, not this week. Last week everyone was talking about it."

"I'm afraid Olga's an ungrateful girl," said her aunt. "Laura, I hope you're not very tired. Did you find it a fatiguing journey?"

"Oh, no, not at all, Aunt Susan," Laura said as they went into the dining-room, which was papered in dark red, and bristled with stags' heads. "It was my first night on a train, and I found it all most exciting and pleasant. And the scenery today was too lovely. I couldn't look at it enough. But I'm terribly hungry."

Horace Leighton made a teasing comment on her appetite.

"You two seem to have got on very well," said Olga. "Laura is such a prim soul as a rule, it takes her months to know anybody."

"Not Mr. Leighton," answered Laura, wishing she could outgrow the trick of blushing, "but then he makes it so easy for one."

After lunch the two girls went upstairs to Laura's bedroom, a small room at the corner of the house with windows looking two ways and commanding a great expanse of country. Olga inspected Laura's wardrobe at the latter's request and said she would do, though her boots might have been heavier.

"But do we go out shooting with the men?"

"Yes, of course. I do, anyway, and you can if you like. Otherwise it would mean staying at home with Aunt Susan and Mrs. Lockyer and Lady Salpepper. Mrs. Lockyer is much too æsthetic to walk. My dear, she's handsome, of course, but she trails about like one of Rossetti's ladies, in the strangest frocks you ever saw. And the sad thing is that there's no one here who appreciates that sort of thing, though H.R.H. is said to. She's been painted by everybody. Leighton adores her. No, no relation to Horace. I mean the painter. She puts on terrific airs, as you'll see for yourself. Uncle Robert and Horace like Colonel Lockyer, though I think he's dreadfully dull, so she gets asked here."

"Mr. Leighton told me that Uncle Robert and Colonel Lockyer were directors of his company," Laura said, hoping to glean more information on this topic, "but he didn't tell me what the company was."

"It's something rather grim," said Olga. "It's armaments—ammunition for war. Leighton and Armytage, the firm is. Horace is very rich now. I suppose it's his bullets that are being used against Arabi in Egypt at this very minute. I do hope that trouble will soon end, for I know the sweetest young officer at Ismailia; he's Sir Garnet Wolseley's A.D.C., and I would so hate anything to happen to him. But to go back to Horace, he's a very desirable parti, in spite of the fact that he's in trade, and Lady Salpepper would give her eyes to get him for Emily. I can see he's taken a great fancy to you. So do remember how rich he is, and don't be too coy and maidenly."

"I hope I'm neither. But Olga, you know I wouldn't marry anyone just for money."

"Of course not. But Horace is an angel."

"Yes, I do like him, but . . ."

"I may as well tell you this, though. He's a tremendous flirt. He'd never be faithful to you. Would you mind?"

"Very much," said Laura.

"How silly! I shouldn't, not if I had everything else. But then I'm not the faithful sort myself. I could never be in love with one man all my life, and I don't even mean to try."

"That may be all right for you, but I wouldn't marry if I felt like that."

"One's got to get married. That's the chief thing. A woman might as well be dead as not married. Now it's no use your quoting useful females at me, like Florence Nightingale, because I simply don't care. Come along, the maid will finish putting your things away. I must tell you about Rupert Lyall. He's the most delicious young man. He's staying here. He wears black velvet knee breeches in the evening and Uncle Robert can hardly swallow his soup he hates the sight of him so. He's terribly artistic—not like Mrs. Lockyer, Rupert really is artistic, and paints and composes music. He's teaching me the guitar. Aunt Susan let me ask anyone I liked this time, which was lucky, for Rupert would never have got asked otherwise. We'll go out and look at the garden now, and I suppose I ought to find Emily. She just sits and moons if I don't make her do things. She arranges herself somewhere and then turns her profile to the best advantage and waits to be discovered."

That night at dinner Laura was taken in by Horace Leighton, Aunt Susan reading out to them from a bit of paper who was to take in who when they assembled in the drawing-room. He made himself extremely entertaining, and told her about a trip to America that he had made the year before. He went over to see what he could learn from America about manufacturing, and had learnt a great deal. He was amazed at the wealth and magnificence of the American cities, particularly New York. He had gone to Philadelphia and listened to part of the interminable trial of Guiteau, President Garfield's assassin; he had been entertained at Newport—a wonderful colony of wealthy people, surpassing anything he had ever seen for luxury, comfort and beauty—and in Boston, where he had met many American celebrities.

"And were the American girls as lovely as they are said to be?" Laura asked.

Mr. Leighton admitted that he had met many attractive and charming ones.

"Mind you, I don't think the English girl has anything to fear from them. They are a trifle too assured, perhaps, a little crude and bold, some of them. Still, the Prince of Wales approves of them, and I think London will shortly become their happy hunting-ground."

"I have never met any," said Laura, "but then I have been out very little. I'd like to meet them very much, and I long to go to America. I wonder if I ever shall. This little trip to Scotland has filled me with a desire to travel. I haven't even been to Paris. Papa doesn't approve of Paris. He thinks the French are a frivolous and godless people, which makes me feel sure I should like them very much."

"I wish I might be the fortunate person who first shows you Paris," said Mr. Leighton, in a low voice. "What could be more delightful than to watch the changing expressions of a face like yours, that mirrors everything you feel and see."

"Oh!" said Laura, "then I must be more careful. It's that hateful trick I have of blushing."

"I love it," he murmured, and watched the inevitable colour flood her cheeks.

"Don't, please," she protested. "You are unkind to tease me so. Now I shall listen to Mr. Lyall, who has been trying to talk to me for some time."

"You could never love a man who wore velvet breeches," said Mr. Leighton, "so I am not concerned."

But the conversation at Laura's end of the table had now become general, and Mr. Lyall was drawn into an argument with Colonel Lockyer about British Imperialism, in which several other people joined. Mr. Lyall attacked England for her treatment of Cetawayo, who had at last been given an audience by the Queen, and upon whom he had made such a favourable impression that he was about to be restored to his kingdom.

"England's policy has always been," he said, with the ferocity of a man who rarely gets a hearing, "to commit a wrong, and then to right it noisily. It's like murdering a man for his money and then erecting a monument to him. Look at this Egyptian affair . . ."

"We have no intention of permanently occupying Egypt," said Sir Robert. "Gladstone issued a proclamation to that effect only two days ago. I advise you to read the papers. As for the Suez Canal, everyone knows that we invited the

French to undertake its sole guardianship, and they refused. They must now take the consequences of their abstention. Sir Garnet Wolseley is handling the military operations with superb skill, and he has done nothing that has not been a strategic necessity for the prosecution of war. These continual riots and rebellions must cease. A permanent Turkish garrison in Egypt is unthinkable. The thing is as plain as the nose on my face."

Mr. Lyall looked broodingly upon that member, but remembered in time that Sir Robert was his host and that he was in love with his niece. The conversation then changed, and Mrs. Langtry's determination to play Rosalind was discussed, and her ability to do so successfully. Laura looked at Mrs. Lockyer and wondered if anyone could be more beautiful than that lady. She was wearing a simple but very décolleté green dress embroidered with peacock feathers, and her curly, reddish, Pre-Raphaelite hair was done in the simplest of knots low on her lovely neck. The dress had little, full puffs for sleeves that left the rest of the arm bare, and it was girdled just below the bosom, from whence it fell in straight lines to the floor. Her voice and movements were slow and languid, her large, brown luminous eyes rested upon one face after another with an enigmatic, brooding look, and she rarely smiled. She knew, it appeared, both Wilde and Swinburne; the society of poets would seem to have been that in which she would feel most at home, yet she sought quite other society, had married a fine shot and a member of White's and Brooks's, and was clearly bored at finding herself among people of no great social importance. She seemed to prefer the company of Lady Salpepper to that of the other ladies, and had evidently come to the conclusion that the æstheticism of Mr. Lyall was merely a pose to attract attention to himself, for she snubbed him most politely. Monty Rich and a young man named Hugo Bligh were the chief contestants for her favour, and the most favoured, and Laura was amazed to find that Horace Leighton thought her a bore, and paid her no more attention than he paid to Lady Salpepper.

The next morning Laura and Olga breakfasted with the gentlemen at eight, and (garbed alike in jerseys, cloth skirts of comparative plainness, tam-o'-shanters and tweed capes), set out with them in the big brake. It was a cloudy day, with a restless, shifting wind, and Sir Robert was inclined to be gloomy over the prospect of a poor day's shooting. With the wind in that state they had better have shot somewhere else, but it was too late to change the plans now, and you couldn't leave anything, he confided to Horace Leighton, to these damned keepers, even the best of them.

But Horace Leighton persisted in looking on the bright side of things, which fact he attributed, publicly, to the presence of two lovely ladies. He preëmpted Laura as his partner in the butts for the entire morning, an invitation she accepted, with some fluttering of the heart. He was by no means inclined to make a secret of his desire for her company, nor of the fact that he thought her charming, and this un-English betrayal of his feelings completely captivated her. She was ready, even now, to follow him anywhere. He looked so handsome on the moors, so stalwart, so healthy, so altogether desirable. She loved his mocking high spirits, his bold advances, his bold brown eyes. And what a shot he was! The birds came tumbling down about them, and they were dead before ever they touched the ground, except those that were rather wide, and even they rarely got up again. And between the drives, while they waited for the birds to come, she stood close beside him in the butt, and he whispered nonsense to her, his eyes sparkling mischievously. Or else he was silent and watchful, his gaze fixed on the skyline over which the birds would come, and she stood watching his masculine profile, and listening to the mournful little tune the wind made whistling down the barrel of his gun.

At lunch-time, when the little cart drawn by a rough pony had bumped its way to them over miles of moor, Emily Salpepper and her mother joined them, each riding upon a shaggy moorland pony, and accompanied by Mr. Lyall, who did not shoot. The ladies dismounted at a little distance, and approached slowly, their long skirts catching in the heather at every step. "Why don't they hold them up, as we did?" whispered Laura to Olga. "Because they think the gentleman oughtn't to know that they're bipeds," whispered Olga in reply. "I wish they hadn't come. It was such fun with you and me. How are you getting on with Horace?"

"Almost too well, I think," said Laura, with a little laugh.

"You can't get on too well, don't be a goose. And do remember that he has a house in Stratford Place. It's let now, but it will be yours to do as you please with some day, if you're sensible."

"Oh, Olga, hush! Please don't talk about it like that!" The girls had now wandered away from the rest of the party, out of sight and earshot, but Olga's words alarmed and shocked Laura, as if Horace Leighton himself might hear them. When they returned, Laura sat down by Sir Robert, and would not be persuaded to go into Horace Leighton's butt the rest of that day. The party returned home at six, very weary indeed, as far as the ladies were concerned, but it had been a good day, in spite of Sir Robert's forebodings, and the men were pleased and satisfied. Only Rupert Lyall was in a bad temper, because Olga had temporarily transferred her attentions to Hugo Bligh, having disapproved of his remarks about Imperialism the night before. Also, knowing she was a Philistine, she bitterly resented being called one, and he had done so several times.

Laura wrote twice a week to her mother, a polite little letter containing nothing of her real feelings.

"Dear Mamma,

"I am enjoying it here more than I have ever enjoyed anything, and I dread the day when I must leave. It's like going to a dinner party every night and a picnic every day, with plenty of lovely walks and talks in between. I like everybody very much, except perhaps Lady Salpepper, and I don't really mind her. She's one of those people who always asks, 'Who *was* she?' and somehow one never knows, or cares. But Olga says she told her she wished Emily had my figure, and after that I didn't feel I could hate her very much. It's rained a good deal, but that doesn't seem to matter, here, and though I wish I had one more good evening dress and a rest gown, I don't think the lack has been apparent to anyone but myself. I hope you won't mind if I stay on a few days after the two weeks are up, as Olga very much wants me to, and of course I would like to. So unless you particularly want me back for something, I will stay. I hope Violet is having a happy time. It was nice of Emmie to get her an invitation for the Ludlows' dance, and I'm sure she had a great success. Olga's dresses are lovely, and have very long basques, and the skirts and bodices are made of quite different materials. They all came from Paris, and she has offered to let me copy one or two. Aunt Susan wonders if you know of a footman who would do for the Green Street house. She seems to have great trouble in finding one and says they are a hopeless tribe. She is willing to pay twenty-four pounds a year, all found. I said I would ask you, though I told her I was afraid you didn't know of anybody.

"This house is really very comfortable and quite up-to-date. There is a bathroom, which is most exciting, and it is lovely to lie stretched out in it when you're tired, instead of sitting upright in a small tub. I wish we had one, but I suppose papa still thinks it a dirty habit for several people to use the same bath.

"I've heard a great deal of interesting talk here, though perhaps rather too much about the Irish Question. The war in Egypt is very exciting, and everyone is studying maps of Egypt, from Alexandria and Aboukir to the Nile. I must stop now, and dress for dinner.

"Your affectionate daughter,

"LAURA."

Inwardly she was in a turmoil. She was in love, and with all the ardour and intensity of first love. Horace Leighton could do nothing that did not please her. He became her hero, her idol; at one moment she was unspeakably happy, at the next she was in despair lest the feelings she tried so hard to conceal, were not returned. He hardly left her side, he still teased, questioned, provoked, flattered her, he still paid her a kind of exaggerated homage, but how much, she asked herself, did it all mean? She was terrified of letting him see the devotion, the adoration in her eyes. She developed a kind of tart asperity to mask her real feelings, and this amused him, and spurred him on to greater efforts. He frankly showed his preference for her society, so much so that Lady Salpepper became sarcastic, and Aunt Susan anxious. She discussed with Sir

Robert the advisability of asking what his intentions were toward their young guest and relation, but Sir Robert advised her to let it alone. More harm had been done by meddling, he said, than by allowing things to take their own course.

"But I can't allow the child to be talked about," Aunt Susan said, "and really, if this goes on I shall insist on his declaring himself. I suppose he would be considered a good match, even if he is in trade?"

"A good match!" said Sir Robert. "Gad, I should think so indeed."

"He's not in society," said his wife.

"Then blow society!" returned Sir Robert.

"Yes, my dear, that's all very well for a man, but I assure you that people won't call on her." She added, "I mean the right people, of course."

"Well, see here, my dear. I wash my hands of the whole thing, do you understand me? The whole thing. However it turns out, don't blame me. I'm a director in his company, and I don't care who knows it, and there are times when I wish I were in trade myself. I'm blessed if I don't, with prices soaring every day."

When Sir Robert began to talk about soaring prices, Aunt Susan always knew it was time to drop whatever subject was under discussion, and she dropped this one. A gaunt, austere-looking woman, she was completely dominated by her little round, red-faced husband, and never opposed his wishes once she had clearly understood what they were.

Meanwhile Laura, for the first time in her life, enjoyed feverish days and nights. Life became unreal, delicious, torturing. She was in great good looks. Everything she wore became her, her eyes shone, her skin, darkened by life in the open air, threw up their colour most flatteringly, her piquant irregularity of feature showed to the best advantage. She was violently stimulated by Horace Leighton's presence, by a word or look of his, she lived dangerously and delightfully, and she made up and unmade her mind about his feelings for her twenty times a day. This lovely agony was sweet to endure as long as he was there, but in five days, four days, three days, he would be gone. Had she been too forward; too reticent? Had she encouraged him; discouraged him? She was so inexperienced, had she perhaps handled the situation stupidly? What would Olga have done? But she couldn't ask her. She thought him extremely clever, even though he would so rarely be serious; had he found her dull? She had talked a good deal about herself, about her religious doubts, about her interest in science, discovery, astronomy, philosophy. Had he thought her a prig, a blue-stocking? Young women who interested themselves in such things were frequently unpopular. But he had seemed to like her intelligence—if she were intelligent. Or he had pretended he did. Olga was certain he was deeply in love. So was Laura certain—half the time. And now the next day he would be gone, and nothing had been said, nothing, nothing. She was still the object of his attentions, his badinage, his flattery, his interest, but he said nothing serious. Laura was in despair; her heart turned cold and hard and heavy with disappointment, with disillusionment. Then it had all been a flirtation. . . . Oh, vulgar, hateful, cruel! All the house-party was agog to know if he had spoken, if he would speak, though only Olga dared to ask her. There was no shooting that last day; they all took walks, and played croquet on a sodden lawn and then went in and played Nap indoors. Dinner time came, and he was seated at the far end of the table, between Emily Salpepper and Aunt Susan. Laura sat between Monty Rich, who talked about wine, and Colonel Lockyer, who didn't talk at all. She made her best effort to be gay, aware that Lady Salpepper was watching her and watching Horace Leighton with her small, cold, unkind eyes. After dinner they played Nap again, and then the ladies rose to go upstairs. Good-byes were said, for the Lockyers, Horace Leighton and the two young men were leaving early. Horace Leighton said to Laura, "Will you come to a play with me in London?" and she said she would, hardly knowing whether she replied or not, and caring less. Olga went with her to her room, and said "Well?" as soon as they were in it. "Oh, Olga, please don't ask me any questions tonight!" Laura begged, the tears starting to her eyes. "Oh, very well," said Olga, and went out, pretending to be offended, and not having seen the tears. Laura went to her window, that commanded such an admirable view, opened it, and looked out. The low clouds that had hung over the moors all day had been dispersed by a fresh breeze, and there, hanging superbly in the great vault was Orion, opulent and blazing. "Oh!" murmured Laura, stricken with the beauty of it, and with her pain. And the Galaxy! She leaned out further to see it. Incredible stream of stars, flowing across the skies like some fabulous river. What comfort could she get from it tonight? Only the chill comfort of diminution. What was she? Nothing, nothing, a bit of dust, a particle of infinite unimportance. Perhaps she corresponded in some way with one of the unseen, myriad stars in that vast stream. Humanity was like that, she thought, marching across space, across an endless void.

She had put out her candle, the better to see, and suddenly, behind her in the darkened room came a whisper, "Star-gazing!" She had been on her knees and now got to her feet and stood black against the open window, her heart ready to jump out of her body. The door was ajar, admitting a faint light from the other end of the hall, and it showed her the figure of a man crossing the room swiftly and noiselessly toward her. She was seized and folded in a pair of powerful arms, she was pressed against a breast under which she could feel a pounding heart. "Did you think I would go without saying good-bye?" whispered Horace Leighton, and found her mouth and held it with his own. It seemed to Laura that she was dying of joy. She clung to him, and her knees weakened and gave under her, so that only his grasp kept her from falling. "Horace, Horace!" "Yes, call me that, Laura. Laura, I love you. I love you. Do you love me?" "Oh, yes, yes! How can you ask?" "Then kiss me again." "Horace, darling, I love you." "Kiss me again. Again." "Not any more. . . . I can't . . . you oughtn't to be here. . . ." Yes, once more."

A little light flickered into the room, and they sprang apart. Olga stood in the doorway, holding a candle and ready for bed, with a dressing-gown over her night-dress and her feet bare.

"Well!" she exclaimed.

Horace Leighton took a quick step to Laura's side, and put his arm about her, where she stood unsteadily and half dazed.

"You may tell them, Olga, that Laura has promised to be my wife. But don't tell them where she promised it."

Olga gave an excited giggle.

"I won't. Though if I weren't a perfect lady I could blackmail you two for the rest of your days. Oh, Horace, Laura, I'm so glad. I'll kiss you both, now. Bless you my children. There! But Horace, you'd better be off. If

Aunt Susan catches you here, even matrimony won't make an honest woman of Laura in her eyes."

"I'm just going. I had to see Laura again, to say good-bye. I waited downstairs till they'd all gone up. Good-night, Laura. I'll write to you tomorrow. We'll meet in London very soon. I'll write every day or so. Write to me at the Albany. I must go. Good-night, my dear." He kissed her again, on the cheek, this time. "Good night, Horace," she murmured.

"Did you know he was coming up?" asked Olga, when the door had closed. Laura threw herself on the bed and hid her face.

"No," she said. "I didn't know."

"What a mercy you hadn't begun to get undressed! It's just like Horace. He never does anything like other people. I do admire his spirit. But what a blessing it was me and not Aunt Susan!"

"Yes."

"You don't want me prattling here, do you? Well, I'll go. I just came in to see if you were all right. You looked so depressed, I thought. Are you happy, Laura? I do hope you are."

"Oh, Olga, yes, I'm terribly happy. I can't think yet. We'll talk about it in the morning. I'll tell Aunt Susan in the morning."

"You'd better not tell your father and mother until he's spoken to them himself. They mustn't know about this. Older people pretend that things like this don't happen. His coming to your room to propose, I mean. I only wish they happened oftener. Good-night, Laura darling. Think of the parties you'll be able to give in Stratford Place. I'm proud to know you."

Laura lay on her bed in the dark without moving. She felt exhausted with her own emotions, her own love. She felt his kisses over again, heard his murmured words. She wanted to lie there indefinitely, without moving, without breaking the spell that was on her. "Horace, Horace, my darling, my darling!"

He oughtn't to have come to her room like that. Why had he? He could have spoken to her during the day—any day. It was wrong of him, she tenderly supposed, but as Olga had said, he didn't do anything like other people. He was impulsive, passionate—oh, passionate, yes! And headlong. There was no chilly caution in his make-up, no dull observance of conventions. He was wonderful, adorable, unexpected, unique. He was like a god, she a mortal to whom he had stooped. She was completely dazzled by his brilliance, blinded. "Oh, Horace, it's me you love, me! I can't believe it yet. I don't think I can ever quite believe it. I am engaged to be married to him. It's incredible. It doesn't mean anything. Nothing means anything except that I adore him and he loves me. What a wonderful ending to all my terrors!"

A bird twittered in the garden. She got up and took off her clothes, then slipped, chilled and exhausted, into bed.

CHAPTER VII

As soon as he received Laura's letter, in which she spoke of a Mr. Horace Leighton who had shown her a good deal of attention and from whom he would shortly be hearing himself, Harry went at once to the Royal Hotel, ordered a glass of old brown sherry in spite of his liver, and consulted the copy of Debrett which was lying on the table in the smoking room. Leighton—Horace—the fellow's name wasn't in. Had Laura picked up some nobody, some common fellow in Scotland? Why had the Merton-Stuarts allowed it? He had had his doubts about the wisdom of letting her go alone, and now he believed that these were amply justified. A few days later a letter arrived from Mr. Leighton himself, written from his flat in the Albany, asking for leave to call upon Mr. Deverell either in the Isle of Wight or in London. The charms of Cowes having already begun to pall on Harry, he told Rosa he thought it time they went back to town. She agreed, for she didn't think it suitable for Mr. Leighton—of whose eligibility she had high hopes, in spite of Debrett—to see them for the first time in sea-side lodgings.

"I don't think Laura is the flighty kind, to be carried away by the first comer," she said to Harry as they paced up and down the promenade that day. "She's twenty, and much more serious-minded than I was at her age. I married at eighteen, and yet frivolous and young as I was, I chose wisely."

"Thank you, my dear. But remember that the young people of to-day are actuated by one sole motive—the desire to do something to pain or annoy their elders. I entirely agree with what the Vicar said on Sunday—rebellion and anarchy are in the air, and are nowhere more evident than in the behaviour of the young generation. We have one notable example of it in our own family, and I very much fear that Laura is not altogether untainted." He broke off to say, "Why do you keep turning about while I am talking?"

"It's nothing. I just wanted to see how that woman's bonnet was trimmed. She was very well dressed."

"I assure you," went on Harry, "that I mean to acquaint myself with every detail of Mr. Leighton's birth, past record and present position, both financial and social. We have spent endless care on Laura's upbringing, to say nothing of thought and money, and I don't intend to let her throw herself away on some worthless fellow who hopes to make use of her youth and gentle breeding to further his own ends."

"I wonder what he is," said Rosa. "If he has a calling of any sort, I mean."

"Let us hope," Harry replied, "that he is a God-fearing English gentleman. That is calling enough for any man."

Violet was in no hurry to return to London, having made great friends with Pettie Audley, the daughter of the Vicar. This young girl had been twice to the theatre in London, unknown to her parents, had seen Fanny Davenport and Sarah Bernhardt, and had become violently stage-struck. She now did impersonations of these actresses in a way that Violet, never having seen them, thought remarkable, and was teaching her to do the same. But when she heard what was taking them home, her grief changed to excitement and elation. Provided that Laura's future husband wasn't so eligible and so good-looking that she could never hope to do as well, she anticipated the greatest pleasure and satisfaction from becoming Miss Deverell. She at once put her hair up, in preparation for the event, and Rosa and Harry were so charmed with the result that they hadn't the heart to make her take it down again.

Laura returned from Scotland on the same day that her family arrived from Cowes, in a fever of excited anticipation. Harry took her into his library and interrogated her, but she would say very little. She told him it was quite true that she loved Mr. Leighton, and wanted to marry him. In fact, she was quite sure she would never love anyone else. She seemed to Harry to have grown taller, and to have acquired an added dignity. It did not please him that his daughters should show dignity in his presence. He liked humility, or the sort of ingratiating playfulness sometimes exhibited by Violet. And what, he asked, were Mr. Leighton's religious views? To what church did he belong? Laura said she supposed the Established Church, but they hadn't had much time to discuss religion. They seemed to have had time, Harry remarked, for less important things. And his financial and social position? Laura said she preferred that Mr. Leighton himself should tell him about that, but she was sure they were quite satisfactory. No, she didn't think forty too old. And he was really only thirty-nine. She didn't care for very young men. Yes, Mr. Leighton had written to her several times since he left Scotland. No, the letters were private, she couldn't very well show them to him.

"What business," Harry demanded, "has he to be writing love-letters to you before he has my consent to your engagement?"

"But, papa, we love each other. We hope to marry. Naturally—"

"There is nothing natural about it. It is highly unnatural that he should think so little of the proprieties as to behave in such an irregular way. What you have told me, Laura, does not at all predispose me in Mr. Leighton's favour."

"I'm sorry, papa. But as soon as you see him you will know that everything is all right."

As she went up to her room, she thought:

"What would they say, my darling, if they knew you had come into my bedroom to propose?" She reflected that when one really loved, one understood all the actions of the loved one. "If you don't find a reason immediately, you look for it till you do."

She wrote to James to tell him of her happiness, and to assure him that the one love could not possibly displace or affect the other in any way. The day after her return, Amelia came to see her with his reply in her pocket. She burst into sentimental tears on hearing Laura's news. Nothing would ever be the same again. It was all over, she had lost her dearest friend, she had always known it would happen. Laura kissed and tried to comfort her and was glad when she went so that she could read James's letter in peace. He said that he had had a kind of presentiment, and wasn't altogether surprised. He wouldn't congratulate her yet as there was papa to get round, and he was sure to make things unpleasant in some way. He himself probably would not meet Mr. Leighton till after the wedding—supposing it all went well. He assured Laura that she was his dear friend and dearest sister, and that nothing could affect his love for her. He went on to say that poor Mrs. Lovelace was far from well, and they were all very anxious. He and Cedric made as little noise as possible for fear of disturbing her, but she had at last consented to see a doctor and he hoped it was nothing really serious.

At the appointed time Horace arrived. He drove up in a hansom which he sent away and Laura, watching from her mother's bedroom window—Harry had asked her not to come down until he sent for her—saw his strong, purposeful figure quickly cross the pavement and ascend the shallow steps. He was ceremoniously dressed in morning coat and grey top hat, and seemed to her a stranger. She paced up and down the room, sick with anxiety and nervousness.

"What is papa saying to him at this moment? What is he thinking of papa? Will he like me less when he sees that papa is prejudiced and not at all lovable? He will like mamma, mamma is really very sweet. She has never had a chance, with papa as a husband, to be herself."

Minutes passed, half an hour, three-quarters—would they never send for her? At last Grace came up and said she was wanted in the drawing-room. She went down and saw Horace sitting between her father and her mother, and she could feel at once that discomfort in the air that surrounds people who have disagreed. Horace got up as she came in and advanced with both hands outstretched, saying with a laugh that was half amused, half annoyed;

"Well, my dear! I'm afraid things are not going well. I seem to be objectionable to your father for quite a number of reasons."

Harry told her, brusquely, to sit down, and began, with a little cough, to tell her on what grounds he was against this marriage. He was like a barnyard fowl, she thought, strutting and clucking—he was on his feet now, walking with short steps up and down the carpet, his hands behind his back. Rosa sat silent, pulling at a little lace handkerchief. She was wearing her best dress of stone-grey Louis velveteen, and had put on all her false hair for the occasion. Horace's attitude, while her father talked, was one of amused tolerance, though Laura could see that he was bored and exasperated. Yet he smiled at her as if to say, "See how patient I am. See what I will go through for your sake."

They had reached an impasse. Her father stated that he had no serious objections to Mr. Leighton provided he would give up business and go into politics again. He hoped he knew best what would make for the happiness of his daughter. A father has instincts denied to other people. His experience as head of a family and man of the world enabled him to see further and more clearly than other people, and it was his duty to safeguard his daughter's interests.

"Huckstering, bargaining, shopkeeping," said Harry with a gesture. "I don't like it. I don't like it. Trade there must be. No one realizes that better than myself. It is the basis of this country's greatness. But that does not affect my determination not to allow my daughter to marry into it while there are still—you will pardon me I hope—still gentlemen for her to marry."

"Oh, papa!" cried Laura, indignant. Harry ignored her and went on;

"You say you have been in politics. Return to the House of Commons, Mr. Leighton, and I will place no difficulties in the way of your marrying my daughter."

Horace smiled, the smile of a man who keeps his temper by sheer will power, and replied that he had his directors and shareholders to think of. It was quite out of the question for him to return to politics at present. He added that he thought he was of more use to his country manufacturing the means of victory in war than sitting on the Opposition benches among a lot of prating politicians.

"I think Horace is perfectly right, papa," Laura said. "And you seem to forget that a manufacturer isn't exactly a shopkeeper."

Harry told her, coldly, that he hadn't sent for her in order to correct him, and that he remained of precisely the same opinion as before.

Horace turned his bold, amused eyes on Laura.

"Well," he said, stroking his moustache away from his lips with an upward motion and laughing a little, "I didn't expect to be rejected on the grounds that I am a man of means. When my father died ten years ago, he left me the factory and a little less than two thousand a year. What my income is now I have already told you."

"I do not consider," said Harry, standing by the mantelpiece, "that mere wealth is everything. There are other things to be taken into account."

"Let me tell you, sir," said Horace, smiling and looking at Laura, "that the artistocracy will soon be up to its neck in trade. Up to its neck. I could give you a list of names of men now in trade that would astonish you, men who come from the oldest families in England. Sir Robert Merton-Stuart—"

"A relation of mine," interrupted Harry, "but merely by marriage, and no Vere de Vere. Only a jumped-up baronet."

"Sir Robert Merton-Stuart," went on Horace, still looking at Laura, "is trying to persuade me to have his son-in-law, Lord Volens, as a director. I don't want him. But that is neither here nor there. I merely wish to point out to you that I consider your objections unreasonable and out of date. In time, Leighton and Armytage will be one of the greatest businesses in England. Germany has her Krupps, England will have her Leighton and Armytage. And if your stock-broker has not already advised you, I might suggest that you would do well to buy shares in my new company, to be floated next week."

"Thank you, I buy Consols," said Harry. "Well, Mr.

Leighton, it seems to me there is nothing more to be said. You do not propose to give way, no more do I. I have no doubt it is all for the best."

Horace stood up.

"I cannot compliment you on your far-sightedness, sir, nor can I feel that you really have your daughter's welfare at heart. However, perhaps after considering the matter at your leisure, you will change your mind. I am sorry that this interview has ended so unhappily—"

But Laura had not yet been heard from. She had been sitting near Horace, alternately looking at him and at her father. She had come to the conclusion that her future was in the hands of a man who was little better than a lunatic, without judgment, balance or wisdom. And now she was terrified at what she saw would be the culmination of her love affair. Horace had stooped to her, in a way that seemed to her miraculous, and now her peevish, prejudiced nobody of a father saw fit to reject him. It was more than she could endure. She turned upon him.

"What is all this fuss about?" she cried. "What is at stake? My position in society? I have none. Nor have you and mamma. You talk as if I were a Princess of the blood, instead of an ordinary, middle-class girl. We own nothing, no wealth, no lands or estates, nothing. We have neither influential friends nor rich relations, except the Merton-Stuarts, and they, at least, appreciate Horace and think me a lucky girl. No, I won't be quiet, papa, I mean to say my say. It means my whole life, my whole happiness. I wont be treated like a child any longer. I'm not a child. I'm a grown woman, and nearly twenty-one. I love Horace, I adore him, and I mean to marry him. I'm glad he's in trade. It interests him and if I were a man it would interest me. If you won't settle anything on me, Horace will take me without a settlement. Won't you, my dearest?" she cried, her voice breaking. "Nothing will stand in our way. Will it, Horace, will it?"

Her breast was heaving, her blue eyes swimming in tears, her cheeks flushed with anger and excitement. She turned to Horace with outstretched hands, as though she would run into his arms, but Rosa pulled her back.

"Laura, this isn't the way to behave. Your papa knows best, and I must say I think he has been very fair. If Mr. Leighton wants you as much as he should want you if he is to be your husband, he will do as your papa says and go into the House of Commons again."

"If Horace were as weak as that I wouldn't want to marry him," retorted Laura. "Do you suppose you and papa can bully him into doing something he knows he oughtn't to do?" She broke away from Rosa's detaining hands and ran to Horace, who put an arm about her.

"My dear," he said, with a little laugh, "I don't want to be the cause of your quarrelling with your family."

"I don't care," she sobbed, breaking down altogether, now that she had his shoulder to lean against. "I want to quarrel with them. You don't know how unhappy I am here. How I hate it."

A very stormy scene followed. Harry ordered her upstairs. She refused to go. He asked Horace to leave the house. She clung to him. Horace kept an arm about her while the battle raged round them. Laura was desperate, like a woman fighting for her life. She struck out at her father with bitter words. She told him she hated him, and had hated him ever since he drove out James for having opinions of his own. He cared nothing for their happiness, nothing, he was only indulging his own crazy conceit and self-righteousness. It satisfied his vanity to send Horace away, and she wasn't going to be the victim of anything so senseless and so cruel. She implored Horace to marry her at once, at once. Her father and mother hated her, and she couldn't live with them any longer.

Rosa hovered about her, shocked and distressed. From time to time she put her hands over her ears as though she couldn't bear to hear what Laura was saying.

"Laura, stop it! It's not true. We do love you. It's all for your good. How can you say such things?"

"Come, come!" Horace said, smiling like a man who finds himself in a false and embarrassing position, and smiles to cover up his real feelings. "Come, we mustn't have scenes. Try to control yourself, Laura. Stop crying. Hush, hush!"

At the word "scenes," Laura raised her head, and tried to stifle her sobs. She wiped her eyes and begged Horace to forgive her. It was the first time it had ever happened. She hated scenes, too, she said, but she had borne too much. First James, and now this. And always this horrible pretence that it was all for their good.

Harry meanwhile had been standing by the mantelpiece with its draped and tasselled cover, its "Gothic" overmantel of ebony, its Chinese plates and fussy little clock. His face was like a mask. It seemed to have withered and contracted. He regarded Laura with such icy coldness that she could hardly endure to meet his eyes.

"Very well. What I said to your brother, I now say to you. I see you are tarred with the same brush. Go. Go at once! I have no longer any need for you here. You say you hate me. Then leave my house. Go with this man if you like. I don't care what you do. You will never get one penny from me. Do you understand me? Not one penny."

But Rosa now turned to him, her whole body quivering, her face distorted.

"No, Harry, no! I won't have my daughter turned into the street. You've gone too far. There's been enough talk and enough unhappiness about James. It shan't happen again with Laura, whatever she does or says. If she goes, I go."

There was a moment's silence, broken only by Laura's sobs. Rosa and Harry confronted each other, and they seemed to be seeing each other for the first time. At last Harry said;

"She may stay until she marries, but I will never speak to her again."

"It's your own fault if I don't love you, papa," said Laura, wiping away her tears. "I adored you once. You killed my love for you by your unkindness and your lack of understanding."

Harry ignored her, and addressed himself to Horace.

"My wife will arrange everything. We will avoid an open break, because she wishes it. If you choose to marry this young woman without a settlement, you are free to do so, but kindly do not regard yourself as my son-in-law, for I shall not regard you as such. Sir Robert must give her away. I wash my hands of the whole matter. I will plead ill health. Good day to you."

Suddenly and dramatically he left the room, and when he closed the door behind him there was silence. At last Laura went to her mother and kissed her.

"Thank you, mamma, for standing up for me as you did. And please forgive me for what I said. I was desperate. I do love you very much and I think you have been very brave. Horace and I will be married as quietly as possible. It could be quite soon, couldn't it, Horace?"

"Whenever you like, my dear. I am grieved, though, to have been the cause of so much trouble." He gave a little laugh. "I didn't anticipate—well, never mind that. Let us try to forget it. Are you better now?"

Laura managed to smile at him, and said she felt much better. Rosa, who had recovered her calm a little, said that as they were now an engaged couple, they would have a great deal to talk about, and she would leave them. Laura protested, begging her to stay, but she went, accepting another grateful and remorseful kiss from Laura, and a kiss on the cheek from Horace, which, as Harry had not recognized him as a son-in-law, she seemed a little doubtful about permitting. Alone for the first time, with the exception of those few indiscreet moments in her bedroom, Laura looked adoringly at her future husband and moved toward him for his kiss. Some of the magic of their first embraces was gone, driven away, like a wild bird, by the battle that had just raged so noisily. He kissed her, and she wondered at and rejoiced in the fragrant smoothness of his shaven cheeks, the softness of his moustache, and the physical comfort and solace of his caresses.

"The course of true love, my dear," he said, smiling at her. "It seems to be so in our case." Then suddenly he held her very tightly and kissed her with passion, until breathless and in some deep stratum of her mind, a little frightened, she made him loosen his hold of her.

"Horace, tell me, do you really love me very much?"

"My dear, of course. I shall probably make you a very bad husband. Why do you shake your head?"

"Horace, you know that isn't true. Let us see each other very often before we marry. I want to know you better, and I want you to know me."

"We will. I hope I shan't see very much of your father.

Fortunately, he won't want to see me. I can quite understand your wanting to get away from him."

"He's got very strange ideas of his own importance. I think he's talked about God so much that he imagines he's rather like God, or God is rather like him. Are you religious, Horace?"

"I suppose I have my religion."

"You must tell me what it is. Perhaps I shall want to make it mine."

"How thick your hair is. May I kiss it?" He took her into his arms again, but more gently.

"I'm so ashamed of what happened this afternoon, Horace. Promise me you'll forget it. I've never cried and made a scene before in my life, not even when James went. But I thought I was going to lose you for ever, and I couldn't bear it. I forgot everything but that."

"Do you love me so much then?"

"Oh, my dearest! I think you're the most wonderful man in the world. I know you are. Why do you love me? You must know hundreds of pretty and charming women. But it's no good asking that. I expect you hardly know yourself. Do you mind taking me without a settlement? Please tell me if you do."

"Have I given you the impression that I minded?"

"No, no, of course not."

"Put your arms around me. Yes, that's better. Was I the first man you ever kissed?"

"Yes," she whispered. "The very first. Are you pleased or sorry?"

"You're not like Olga, who kisses everyone. Always show your forehead. You have a beautiful forehead. Who do you look like? Not your parents. Your grandfather, perhaps."

"Who do you look like?"

"I'm told I'm the image of my mother. She died years ago. I must go now, my dear. I have a meeting at five."

"But I'll ring for tea first."

"No, no tea. What play would you like to see this week?"

"Oh, can I see Fanny Davenport in 'Diane'? Oh, please, please!"

"It's not a play for young girls, you know."

"Oh, then I want to see it all the more. I'm so tired of being a young girl."

"You shall see it. But I ought to take you instead to see Lily Langtry in 'The Unequal Match.' That's perfectly proper."

"Take me to both. And may James come too one night?"

"Yes, I'll ask James too."

"I'm so proud of my brother. You will like him, won't you?"

"Well," he said, with a little laugh, "will he like me?"

"Oh, of course. I'm going to be so happy, Horace."

"My dear, I hope so. You must get yourself a blue dress that matches your eyes."

"I will. I'll take more interest in my clothes now. I hate to have you go. Think of me in this house with papa not speaking to me, and mamma anxious not to displease him by being too nice to me, and only Violet to talk to."

"When shall I see Violet?"

"The next time you come, I expect. She's very pretty. A hundred times prettier than I am."

"Will your maid whistle for a hansom? I must go."

He went, after a brief embrace, as though his mind had already travelled ahead of him to the meeting he was to attend at five. When the hansom had driven him away, with a brisk clatter of hoofs and a gay jingle of bells, Laura dropped into a chair and closed her eyes, for she was suddenly so tired that she could barely stand. How exhausting these emotions were! She began to criticize her own conduct. Had she done right to break with her father, to quarrel with him so irrevocably? Would he perhaps have come round if she had waited? Did Horace altogether approve of her conduct? Had she been unwomanly, perhaps, too bold? No, no, if she had been weaker, said nothing, she would have lost him, perhaps for ever. "I couldn't let him go, I couldn't." She was a little frightened of Horace yet, for her experience of men had been very small. She acted through instinct, and she didn't altogether trust her instinct. She would learn what he was like if he would only be patient with her. She wanted to learn everything. Instead of feeling a mere speck in infinity she had now become of tremendous importance to herself because she was loved, and by such a man!

That autumn, her days were entirely devoted to preparing for her wedding. The house in Stratford Place had just been vacated and was to be made ready for her as soon as possible. Rosa, all her maternal feelings having come to the fore, sold a diamond butterfly that had belonged to her mother, and that she had never cared for, to buy her a trousseau, for Harry offered not one penny toward this end. She now went shopping with her mother and sometimes Olga, almost daily, and now and again James joined them somewhere. He had lost weight again, and all his good spirits, for Mrs. Lovelace was believed to have cancer, and Mr. John's grief and anxiety were terrible. As it was necessary to have a nurse in the house, James and Cedric took rooms together in Pimlico, which they could barely afford, and there was still no money for clothes, and scarcely enough for food.

"When I am married, my darling," said Laura to James, "I will be able to help you at last."

But James was very reticent on this point. He had not been able to feel any enthusiasm for Horace on the one or two occasions when Laura had succeeded in bringing them together. An ardent hater of war, he disliked the thought that Laura's money would come from shells and bullets.

"But you like Horace, don't you?" Laura asked.

He lied, a thing he loathed doing.

"Yes, of course, very much."

He relieved his feelings after that by writing a poem which he called "Janus in Love." Horace had not affected him pleasantly. He thought him too ready to talk about himself; he thought his eyes were too bold, his manners too easy. He liked him, on the other hand, for the very things Harry disliked him for. The man was a worker, an organizer. He was able, he produced something. But he felt the presence of something shifting and over-mobile in his nature, something shallow. A man for whom everything had been too easy. And why was he marrying Laura? It puzzled James. Why Laura? Why a girl so sincere, so sensitive, so highminded, so undowered except with brains and charm? That he was strongly attracted to her physically, James saw. It looked out of his eyes, which rested all too warmly upon her.

But he finally decided that anything was better for her than living in Kensington Square with their father, which was only a sort of death-in-life, and could teach her nothing.

"I'll try to like him," he said to himself, and tore up "Janus in Love."

Ireland, under Lord Spencer, was for the moment fairly peaceful. A police strike in Dublin and the war in Egypt were the chief newspaper topics, and all England went wild over the taking of Tel-El-Kebir. Two days after its capture Sir Garnet Wolseley was able to telegraph that the war was over. But the young A.D.C. of whom Olga had spoken so enthusiastically had died, like many another, of enteric.

One day while she was in one of the bedrooms of the house in Stratford Place, choosing the papering, Laura looked out of the window and saw her father examining the house from the opposite pavement. It was the first sign of interest he had shown, and he believed himself to be unobserved. She watched the bony, sallow-faced man with the now old-fashioned side-whiskers, with pity and some amusement. He was impressed, she supposed, with the size and position of the house.

"Poor papa! How miserable he makes himself and everyone else."

Horace had given her a pug-dog (everyone had them) and a solitaire diamond ring from Streeter's in Bond Street. They were going to San Remo for their honeymoon and were then going to live in one of the new mansion flats until the house was ready. The furnishing and re-decorating would take time—and oh, the cost of it! Unused to spending money, she was horrified at the prices of things. Thirty-five pounds for a brass bed—a double one, to be sure, with a mattress included—seemed to her enormous. (It took all her strength of will to avoid colouring and looking embarrassed and confused before the salesman when Horace made a little joke about it in his teasing way.) She had pictured herself furnishing the house exactly as she pleased, but she found that Horace wished to have a good deal to say about it, and almost before she knew it they had bought the carved wall-brackets she was already so tired of, the Japanese screens, the tall, twisted lamps with frilly shades, Morris chairs, a Morocco suite for Horace's "den," tapestries (modern, and in Morris design) and Wilton pile carpets in bright, crude colours for all the rooms. Certainly Horace was lavish, and spared no expense. He even bought the linen usually provided by the bride—"Since your father will do nothing"—and though he did all these things with a good grace, he reminded her from time to time that he was doing them.

"I don't deserve that you should be so good to me," Laura would say.

Their shopping was hurried, for he had to be in the City most of the day, and once a week he took the train to the great works on the East Coast, near Whitby, and stayed away two days. But on Saturdays and Sundays he called for her in a hansom—oh, driving with Horace, so well-dressed and so good-looking, behind a briskly trotting little horse in the charming intimacy of those inward folding doors was a delight!—and took her to lunch with or to call on various friends and relations. These meetings, which Laura dreaded at first, were made easy by Horace's gaiety and nonsense, his easy talk, and his way of making Laura feel a person of importance. He invariably told people how well-read she was, and how intelligent.

"If I am," Laura would explain, blushing with pleasure and embarrassment, "I'm sure it's because I have a clever brother, who made me read. He reviews books and writes poetry. He'll be famous some day."

It saddened her that James was not more often included in their outings. Even when Horace did invite him, he wouldn't always come, but pleaded that his clothes were too shabby, which was true enough, and Laura finally had to insist on his accepting part of a cheque that her Uncle Robert gave her, so that he could appear decently clad at her wedding.

"For as papa refuses to be present, there's no reason why you shouldn't come and sit in the front pew with mamma."

But, as Rosa had all along predicted, Harry made it known at the last moment that he intended to give away his daughter himself, and though he still strongly disapproved of the match and couldn't bring himself to make up his quarrel with her, he now spoke to Laura occasionally to ask her, with frigid politeness, how the house was getting on.

Like many another bride she was whirled to her marriage day through a complicated maze of fittings, visits to milliners, interviews with plumbers and decorators, and meetings with Horace's relations and friends—well-to-do people for the most part and pleasant enough, though she missed something in them that she had no time to put a name to. The fact of his being in trade seemed to prejudice none of them, it only seemed to matter very much to old-fashioned people like the Bonners and her parents, and Florrie Peddler, who was horrified.

Nothing threatened her peace of mind at this time except the sad fact that poor Mrs. Lovelace was dying of cancer, and her sufferings and Mr. John's grief were terrible. James went almost daily to see her and to talk to Mr. John, and it was then that he wrote his poem, "The Crucified," which was later published among his collected verse. For Mrs. Lovelace was being crucified, he told Laura, as much as if she were nailed to a cross, and her sufferings would endure far longer. The poem came out first in a weekly journal, and Harry saw it and at once put the paper on the flames, an incident witnessed only by Rosa. Horace read it and thought it clever, but only Laura knew that it was a cry of pain.

"He hates life," she thought. "He hates the world. And because I like it, and am taking as much of it as I can get, we are growing miles apart."

One day in November, a week after the triumphant return of the troops from Egypt—the little Widow of Windsor came to London and reviewed them, and they made a fine show of it—the following notice appeared in the *Times*:

"The Marriage of Mr. Horace Walter Leighton of the Albany, son of the late John Fowler Leighton, and Miss Laura Alicia Deverell, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Harry Wellesley Deverell of 90, Kensington Square, took place at St. Mary Abbott's, Kensington, by special licence on Saturday afternoon. The bride was attended by her sister, Miss Violet Deverell, and two bridesmaids, Miss Olga Merton-Stuart and Miss Amelia Bonner. The bride wore a dress of cream satin with a train bordered with plush, the front being trimmed with flounces of point de gaze, and the spray of orange blossoms in her hair was covered by a little veil fastened with diamond stars, the bridegroom's gift. The bridesmaids wore toilettes of cream-coloured moiré trimmed with fur and tied with cream-coloured sashes, and toques of brown velvet with brown aigrettes. The bride's travelling dress was of blue plush with plush jacket and bonnet, and beaver collar and muff. She was given away by her father, the best man being Mr. Rupert Glazier. The honeymoon will be spent at San Remo."

Rosa cried in the approved fashion, Harry kissed Laura coldly, managed to avoid shaking hands with Horace, and contrived not to see James, who came with Felix Bonner. James embraced Laura with great tenderness and with tears in his eyes as she got into the carriage to drive away—for he was not going to the reception—and then took himself off. He had discovered, during the ceremony, that he could look upon his father without any emotion, either of hate or affection. That ageing, peevish face—what had it to do with him? He was a stranger with whom he had nothing in common, to whom he had nothing to say. He was walking down the High Street when he heard running footsteps behind him and turned to see Felix Bonner.

"I'm not going to the reception, either," said Felix, out of breath. "Where are you going?"

"Anywhere," answered James. "I've been thinking about my father. Do you suppose he quarrels with us so that he won't have to part with any money? He is quit of me, and now he is quit of Laura without even a settlement. Will he quarrel with Violet in the same way, and be quit of her?"

"By Jove!" exclaimed Felix. "I never thought of that. The canny old devil!"

"No," said James. "To do him justice, I don't really think it's that. He can't help quarrelling. But all the same, he's saved a lot of money by it." He added, "Cedric Jackson's gone to Cumberland, so I'm alone. Mrs. Lovelace is worse, Laura's married to that purse-proud fellow, and the world's a foul place. Take me out somewhere this evening and help me to get drunk."

"I was going to suggest going to the Alhambra," said Felix, who still loved the theatre. "We'll have a bite of dinner first and after the theatre we'll take little Lilla Vaughn out to supper. Meet me at the Café Royal at seven."

"It will probably save me from suicide," said James. "Who is Lilla Vaughn?"

"My dear chap, she's the lovely little thing who sings that song everyone is talking about, 'A Child's Letter to Heaven.' It's an enormous hit."

"Good God!" exclaimed James. "I'll stop her singing that bit of banality if I can."

"You try it."

"I'll try it. If I get drunk enough, I can do anything."

"I thought drink was bad for you."

"So it is, but to-night I don't care. And why preserve a life so unpleasing to myself?"

They went to the Café Royal, and then to the Alhambra, and after the entertainment was over, Felix took James behind the scenes and introduced him to Lilla Vaughn, and the respectable middle-aged woman in a bonnet and rusty mantle who was known to the theatrical world as her old nurse and to a few intimates as her mother. A more Juliet-like creature than Lilla never trod the boards of a stage, thought James, watching her with searching intelligent eyes. She was a ripe seventeen, tender, impulsive and divinely lovely, and nightly through those perfect lips issued one of the silliest songs that had ever set London humming. There began, then and there, James's first, last and only love affair. Lilla encountered for the first time in her life a young poet, but a young poet whose tongue was caustic and daring, and who yet listened to her when she spoke with the rapt, beautiful eyes of a devoted dog. Stranger still, he instantly recognized the "old nurse" for what she was and addressed her as Mrs. Vaughn (the name was Vokes) with charming courtesy, at the same time not neglecting to let Lilla know what he thought of such a make-believe. Before the evening was much more than half over, she had promised never again to sing, "A Child's Letter to Heaven."

"I entirely disbelieve in a Deity," said James, "but if there were one, and if he were a right-minded God, he would forgive the sale of the body, when inspired by necessity, and lock one out of Paradise for an eternity for selling one's soul."

"But I shall have to give up my job," said Lilla. "And what shall I do then?"

"Marry me," said James, with perfect simplicity, and Felix, astounded and somewhat embarrassed at the turn affairs had taken, ordered another bottle of champagne from the listening waiter.

CHAPTER VIII

November 27th 1887, was Jubilee Year, and the fifth anniversary of Laura's wedding.

She had been awake a good part of the night, for Horatia had a feverish cold and she had gone in to see her several times to convince herself that the child's temperature was not rising. In the morning Horatia was better, but Horace's temper had suffered from the interruptions to his sleep. He got up in a fault-finding mood, managed to remind Laura that he had more to put up with than most men, and that he had married her without a settlement. He had a way of mentioning this fact from time to time, sometimes jocularly, sometimes in order to hear her say that he was the most generous of men, but this morning as a hint that he had a right to expect a life of perfect peace and comfort.

Laura made a sharp rejoinder, then remembered that it was their wedding anniversary and went to him for a kiss. This reminded him that he had bought her a present the day before and he produced a white case which he snapped open, revealing a gold bracelet studded with small diamonds.

Laura was delighted with the gift and thanked him warmly.

"It's just what I most wanted, Horace dear. I have so few jewels."

"Well, my dear, your family ought to have given you some. I have given you two very handsome rings, your diamond stars, and a necklace. Your mother has some good jewellery, but I notice she never gives you any. Of course, we can expect nothing from your father. Why did he have children at all if he wasn't prepared to do anything for them?"

"My dear Horace, I used to wonder that long before I knew you. I wasn't complaining that I had few jewels, I was merely explaining my pleasure in receiving this bracelet. As it seems so easy to quarrel with you this morning I will say nothing more."

"I was not quarrelling. I was merely stating facts, which is admittedly dangerous if there is a woman present. And I cannot see why you persist in ordering two copies of the *Times* as well as that quite unnecessary *Pall Mall Gazette.*"

"Because I like reading the papers at the same time that you do. After I leave the breakfast table I have other things to do. And I like the *Pall Mall Gazette,* it has more news in it. It's a small extravagance. Please don't begrudge it to me, Horace. I haven't many extravagances."

"Well, my dear, considering that you depend on me for every penny you spend—"

"Remind me of that once more and I'll go upstairs." She opened her paper and tried not to let the tears that had gathered in her eyes spill down her cheeks. After a few minutes' silence, he said more amiably,

"Who is coming to tea this afternoon?"

"Just a few old friends, and mamma, and Violet."

"Who are the few old friends?"

"The Bonners, and old Florrie Peddler, and Aunt Susan and Olga, of course."

"I don't know why you bother with people like the Bonners and Mrs. Peddler. She's a perfect scarecrow. Anyone can see that her hair is dyed, and with that haggard face and those modish clothes she's frightful to look upon."

"I only ask her when you're not here, Horace. And I'm entertaining your friends this evening."

"Which reminds me, how have you arranged for us to go in to dinner?"

"You take in Lady Olleridge, of course, and he takes me in. Mrs. Lowenthal goes in with Colonel Lockyer, and Mr. Lowenthal takes in Mrs. Lockyer. Sir George Humphreys takes in Olga."

"Yes, that's quite correct. I've told Merson about the wines. Well, my dear, as you're having a tea-party this afternoon I won't come home until it's time to dress for dinner. I'll have a rubber of whist at the club. Good-bye."

"Good-bye." She raised her face for a kiss. When he had left the room she went to the window and watched him get into the brougham which would presently return for her. He looked very prosperous and handsome in his morning coat and silk hat. He was more florid than he had been five years ago, his face was a little heavier and his neck was thickening, but he was a very good-looking man and his brown eyes were as bold and warm as ever. He was not over-fond of his children, Horatia, aged four and Richard aged two, but he was pleased that they were there, and he looked upon Richard as the future owner of Leighton and Armytage and therefore of importance. He was not at all what was called a family man, but Laura had suffered from a family man in her youth, and was not displeased that the greater part of Horace's interests lay outside his home. He enjoyed racing and shooting, he occasionally went to a ball with her, he liked on the whole to entertain and be entertained, provided his business was not interfered with, and that the people involved were worth while. There was little in this to stimulate Laura's mind, and she tried to avoid social functions during the day so as to leave herself free to be with the children, to study German, to go to lectures, to read poetry, and to follow the activities of the Society for Psychical Research—with Mr. Myers at its head—which at this period of her life interested her enormously. Mr. Myers had just written a book called "Phantasms of the Living" that everyone was talking about, and the subliminal consciousness was beginning to be discussed for the first time. Laura thought it an intensely interesting and awakening world. It seemed to her to be rousing itself out of a long sleep and rubbing its eyes and saying, "What is this?" and "What is that?" and most of all, "What am I?" It combined a lusty Imperialism—"Damn it, sir! If there's any better rule than English rule, I'd like to know what it is!"—with some intelligent inquiries into the whys and wherefores of existence, though it still shifted the responsibilities of man on to God's shoulders, in the happy way of the nineteenth century, and said, that God's ways were mysterious and not to be found out. God had arranged everything so, and He undoubtedly knew best, and there it was. Laura understood this peculiarity of her time because she had been brought up on it. She knew very well how a man could keep one eye on God's will and the other on Debrett and never see the two things at the same time, because her father was like that, and though her father was a far stupider and more disagreeable man than most, his mental processes were very much the average mental processes of his day.

That morning, after Horace's departure for the City, Laura took her newspapers into the library, a small room at the back of the house, behind the big dining-room, and instead of reading, let her mind run back to that time five years ago when she had first married Horace.

Marriage had given her at first the impression of starting life afresh. Since the night at the hotel in London when Horace had initiated her, with a passionate brutality she was quick to forgive, into the mysteries of married life, her girlhood had seemed to recede as if by a miracle. Their journey to the South of France had helped to throw it into the background, for her feet had trodden a new country, her ears had been refreshed by a new language, her eyes had been charmed and educated by new contours, new foliage, new skies.

They stayed in a villa at San Remo lent them by Horace's sister Maud, who was in England trying to arouse interest in the women's franchise. The Riviera! A romantic scene, romantically named. She saw the bright colours and charming scenery and the picturesque peasants so often described in the current illustrated magazines—for Royalty had discovered the Riviera, and all loyal citizens wished to know as much as they could learn about it, so that they could intelligently follow the journeyings of their sovereign. The villa was as gay and bower-like and French as a villa could well be, for Maud took it furnished by the year and had not tried to Anglicize it, and there was nothing to do but to enjoy the passing moment, and to explore the secret, mazy paths of another mind.

A man's mind! Unknown, uncharted country to a girl like Laura. She had looked for perfect confidence, a mutual opening up of the heart and mind, a happy throwing away of reticence. To give the body is so easy, to give the mind so difficult. She found evasiveness, restlessness, jocularity, a tendency to make fun of the things that were important to her. Well, if Horace were restless, what fun to be always doing something! If he were too given to jesting, how good for her to laugh! If he were evasive she need not fear that she would too soon find out all there was to know. She adapted herself to him with all the yielding graciousness of a young and happy bride. And if she felt any disinclination to give in to his moods, there was always the sharp joy of his embrace to melt her—an embrace that was often too abrupt, too unheralded, and too crudely ended, but she accustomed herself to that as she accustomed herself to all his sudden changes from one thing to another, changes so swift that sometimes the very answers to the questions he asked her were not even listened to.

It was while they were at San Remo that James wrote to tell her of Mrs. Lovelace's death.

Laura kept his letter, it was so typical of her brother.

"I have lost my real mother, my best friend. If I had believed in a Deity before, I would disown him now for so cruelly putting to death the dearest and best of women. Cedric and I walked the streets all night arguing, he because he hoped to convince me of a future life, I simply because I couldn't sleep. Mr. John won't survive her long, I am afraid. It is my first experience with death, and I feel profoundly altered by it. Life at first seems like a pleasant water picnic where you and all those you know are floating down a beautiful stream whose sides are bright with flowers, and where the eye is continually enchanted by strange and varied sights. But presently the banks grow higher and more dangerous, they shut out the view and it becomes increasingly difficult to navigate. The scenery becomes gloomier and less beautiful, rank weeds appear by the water's edge, and ugly reptiles lift their heads among them. Presently some friend who has just been talking to you with his hand in yours, slips over the side of the boat with a cry that rings horribly in your ears, and sinks out of sight. You avert your eyes, knowing that he has gone for ever, and that somewhere down the stream, ahead, waiting, is the place where you too will cry out and slip over the side, alone."

The next day there came a letter from Rosa, which Laura also kept, for its unconscious irony.

"I saw James the other day. We met at Penberthy's in Oxford Street, as your father is still determined not to receive him here. He told me about Mrs. Lovelace's death and seemed very upset. Perhaps it will teach him at last that there is a God. I sincerely hope so."

When Laura found she was going to have a baby and imparted the news to Horace, he was not as moved and stirred as she had expected. He was inclined to tease her, to make fun—but not in an unkind way—of her disabilities. It was clear that he thought the whole thing rather a bore and was already impatient of the long months ahead. Later her altered looks offended him, though he never omitted the more obvious attentions, and made her a number of small presents. She entertained his friends and went out as long as she dared, and her activities probably helped her for she came through the ordeal remarkably well. She rejoiced that it was a girl— "I shall bring her up as differently as possible from the way I was brought up," were Laura's first words—and Horace was pleased at the idea of calling the child Horatia. When, a year and a half later, she produced a boy, he showed his satisfaction by giving her a very handsome necklace. But the children did not amuse him, and he resented it if Laura spent too much time with them.

At the time Richard was born the whole country was stirred by the Gordon affair. Thanks to a newspaper campaign—(Mr. Stead had introduced the new journalism, which, not content to record, must influence events)—Gordon had been chosen to go to Khartoum to get the troops out of the Soudan. Instead he stayed to "Smash the Mahdi," and there ensued the complicated muddle which ended in the Mad Mahdi smashing him. Horace had a poor opinion of Gordon with his Bible and his walking stick and his mysticism, but he was furious with the government for its slowness in sending reinforcements, and his opinion of Gladstone, already low, fell to zero when Gordon was killed. Public opinion now turned against Gladstone and against the Home Rule Bill in consequence, and progressives rejoiced that before the tragedy of Khartoum the third Reform Bill had already passed in safety. Horace began to toy with the idea of returning to politics. Leighton and Armytage no longer required nursing; it was a great and going concern; so when a seat in Herefordshire fell vacant, he decided to contest it. But at that moment he was taken ill and spent five weeks in bed with a bad attack of pleurisy. When he got up again, he had changed his mind, and he then put away all idea of a return to politics, to Laura's great relief, for an indefinite period.

That afternoon Lady Merton-Stuart arrived first.

"How pretty you look, Laura, my dear, not in the least like a mother of two. It's amazing the way women keep their youth and looks nowadays. I often think a woman never looks her best till she's had children, though my Helen's rather overdone it, with her six. Yes, I'd love a cup of tea. Who else is coming?"

"Just mamma and Violet and the Bonners and Mrs. Peddler."

"Not James?"

"No, James isn't coming. I saw him yesterday."

"Is that dreadful young person still with him?"

"Dear Aunt Susan, that young person is his wife. Of course she's with him. He adores her. And she's given up everything to be with him."

"And what had she to give up, pray? She married above her, which is what all such girls try to do."

"She gave up a very promising career. She had already had a success, at seventeen, and she would have had more. She could sing and dance, she's pretty, she had admirers. It isn't the life one would choose for one's own daughter, certainly, but think what a sacrifice to give it all up and share James's hardships! And they've had plenty of hardships, too. I admire her more than I can say."

"You don't really like her. You couldn't."

"I do like her. I'm very fond indeed of Lilla."

"Well, I won't discuss her. You know what I feel. I think it's a terrible tragedy. How is Horace? And are you as much in love as ever? I've often said to Robert, if ever adoration looked out of a girl's eyes, it looked out of yours. And of course men love that."

"Horace is very well. I'm praying he won't have pleurisy again this winter. It's a hateful thing. Olga said she'd call for you later. Did she tell you? She's coming to me tonight, too."

"I don't at all approve of that. It's only ten months since poor Arthur's death. She might at least have waited until the year was out."

"But Aunt Susan, if she didn't go out I really believe she'd go mad. You can't expect her to stay down at Pennyfields by herself. She's quite right to come to London and see people. You know she only just escaped melancholia. It was the most awful shock to her, seeing him killed like that before her eyes."

"I could believe in her grief much better if she saw the year out before plunging into gaieties again. And all that cigarette smoking. . . ."

"It won't be very gay here to-night," said Laura. "There are only some of Horace's directors and their wives coming. I'm thankful Olga will be here. I shall need support."

"Well, I don't at all like the way women are behaving today. They're becoming unsexed, both the married and the unmarried ones. However, I won't bore you with my opinions, though I know I'm right. Where did you get that nice, respectable-looking young footman who brought in the tea? I've had nothing but trouble with servants lately. It quite wears me out."

"I let Merson engage them. It seems to work very well, and I get no complaints."

"I would never dare to do that. I always take up their references myself and go to see their late employers if possible. Not that it seems to do any good. How are your darlings?"

"I'm keeping Horatia in bed today, she'd such a bad cold, and Richard must be on his way home from the Park, so you'll see him soon."

"I don't know how you dare let the children go into the Park any more. Ever since those awful riots I've never set foot there. I wonder what the end of all this will be? These strikes are so terrible, and the things they lead to."

"Horace and I were quite near Trafalgar Square on Sunday," Laura said. "It really was rather frightening, I was afraid one of us might be hurt by a flying brick-bat. Think of it, there were three thousand police in and about the square, the *Times* says, and altogether thirteen thousand soldiers and police trying to keep the peace. We had to get out of the brougham at the foot of Northumberland Avenue, and we dodged down side streets and at last got home, on foot. I never want to see a crowd like that one again, I confess. But nobody's going to hurt nursemaids and children in the Park. Certainly the wretched unemployed won't."

"It's all the fault of these Irish Patriots, and traitors like William Morris and Mrs. Besant. They ought to be clapped in prison and kept there. They're dangerous, stirring up the country. What we want is a strong man. I've nothing against either Gladstone or Salisbury except that they're weak. Hopelessly weak. I am constantly telling Robert that what we want is a strong man at the head of the Government."

Small wonder, Laura reflected, looking at her tall, white-haired, stooping, aggressive aunt, that poor Uncle Robert was spending more and more time at the Reform Club, for however fond you may be of anyone, such silly reiteration was hard to bear. Certainly there was nothing stimulating about her aunt's conversation, domestic troubles and complaints about the existing state of society being her stock-in-trade. Laura herself was dissatisfied with the existing state of society, not because it was changing, but because it did not change fast enough. She believed herself at this time to be a radical, because she had not met many radicals and because the troubles and miseries of the poor had only lately begun to get on her nerves. The poor had been walking at her elbow for twenty-five years, accompanying her on her journey through life with bleeding feet and cries of anguish, and she had neither seen nor heard them. Suddenly she had become vividly conscious of them and now she could not get them out of her thoughts. She went once a week to a Settlement in the East End, not because it was becoming fashionable to do this, but because it eased her conscience a little. She would have liked to do it oftener, but Horace would not allow it, and disliked her going at all. She had lately got into the habit of talking a great deal about these problems to Stubbs, her maid. Stubbs was not at all an ordinary person. She came of a family of poor country-folk in Gloucestershire, and she had told Laura about her childhood. She learnt how Stubbs's two uncles, fine young fellows of twenty-six and twenty-eight had been hanged (this was in 1840, when the harvests failed) for poaching a hare to feed their starving children. Poor people were trying to keep life in their bodies by eating cabbage stalks out of the fields, but the children couldn't live on such fare. The young men were caught, tried and hanged as an example to the rest. Poaching was punishable with death in those days, whatever the incentive. Two of Stubbs's little sisters, a cousin and a baby brother, died in the bed in which she was born. The lean years were by no means over then, and she remembered her mother making bran dumplings because there was nothing else to eat. When she was eight she was a little scullion at the Hall near by, and having wits and energy she had gradually bettered herself. Ten years later she became a ladies' maid, it being discovered that she had neat fingers and a talent for sewing. At thirty-eight she was in Laura's employ and already so devoted to her that it became plain only death would remove her. She had helped to send a young brother to California, where he was doing very well, and she would sometimes read Laura his letters. They were well expressed and interesting, and from them Laura learnt something of the city built on sand dunes at the edge of the Pacific, of the great redwood trees, of the wild flowers, and of the beauty of the bay and harbour. Young Stubbs had gone out there in '79 just after the Chinese labourers had, because of popular agitation, been turned off the lines of the Central Pacific. He had got a job as platelayer, was now overseer of a big work gang, and had prospects of even better things. He was bent on educating himself and read books at night instead of brawling in the saloons. A year before his sister came to Laura, he had taken out naturalization papers, and was now an American citizen. Edward Stubbs became a person of interest to Laura. She liked his crude, vivid expressions. "What news of Edward?" she would ask, and the gratified woman would take his latest letter out of her pocket and give it to her to read.

It was not talking with Stubbs (who envied no one) that had made Laura inclined to be a radical, as much as arguing with Horace about his workpeople and listening to James, and seeing his struggles with poverty. Admittedly, James's poverty was very largely his own doing. If he had chosen to conciliate his father, if, instead of writing he had tried to do some more remunerative work, if thirdly, he had not married, or had married someone with money, his difficulties would, of course, have been less. But he had chosen to do none of these things, and he was desperately poor. While he did not call himself a socialist, or, in fact, anything at all, his sympathies were definitely not on the side of the well-to-do. He was going through, in fact, the phase that almost every intelligent and feeling young man goes through, but suffering rather more badly from it than most.

On the other hand there was Horace with his workpeople. He wanted from them the maximum of effort with the minimum of pay. A full belly meant idle hands, he explained to the incredulous Laura. Remove the element of fear from the life of the British workingman and he was ready to down tools at the first opportunity. So said

Horace, a progressive man in some ways, but in others hopelessly reactionary.

All these things passed through Laura's mind as she sat talking to Lady Merton-Stuart. She never argued with her, any more than she argued with her mother. It was a pointless performance and a waste of time. She led the conversation back to Richard and Horatia, and presently Merson announced Mrs. and Miss Deverell, and the two ladies advanced, primed with good wishes, and kissed her. Violet had lost some of her earlier freshness but she was still lovely, though her mouth these days had a sulky droop. It wasn't very amusing, living at home alone, she found, and so far she hadn't met anyone she wanted to marry. A rather handsome young curate had proposed for her in the summer, but she didn't want to be a curate's wife, though Harry strongly favoured the idea, and offered something quite generous in the way of settlement. The young man remained in the background, knowing that her father was on his side, and wrote her letters from time to time which she answered according to her mood. She had had considerable success with undergraduates, and had spent a happy May Week at Cambridge, but undergraduates were useless matrimonially and she was wretchedly discontented. She thought that under the circumstances Laura ought to have done a great deal more for her. She must know more eligible young men than she pretended she did, and was probably keeping them for herself, young married women were so fast nowadays.

"What a charming dress, Violet!" Laura exclaimed. "I'm so fond of merino. She looks lovely, doesn't she, mamma?"

Rosa had grown a good deal stouter, but otherwise had not changed very much. Her hair was now quite grey, and neither her daughters nor her friends dared to allude to the terrible time three years ago when, in a weak moment, she had experimented with some Peruvian Hair Renewer, with most disastrous results. Her hair had turned a nasty greenish black, and for two years she had been obliged to wear transformations, until it grew out again.

"I think Violet always looks pretty," she answered. "Miss Horridge made the dress. She improves every year, I believe. But, Laura, you must get one of the Langtry bustles, they're wonderful. Violet is wearing one now, and I declare, they make positively all the difference. Turn around, darling. See how well it stands out, and only two and sixpence. I mean to get me one. You can sit down perfectly comfortably in it, can't you dear? Show Laura."

"Yes, and lie down, too," said Violet, disposing herself for a moment on the couch. "It has springs that fold up. I do hope bustles never go out. I think they give the figure such style."

Laura promised to invest in one.

"Violet," she said, as she poured out the tea, "would you like to come with me to-morrow night to see Mary Anderson in 'The Winter's Tale'? Horace will be away at the works, and I thought you and I might go."

Violet pouted. "Just we two?"

"I thought of taking Stubbs and letting her sit in the dress circle."

"I do hate going out without a gentleman."

"Well, never mind. I'll ask someone else and you can come another time."

"No, I'll come. It's better than staying at home. But why didn't you buy four or five seats and have a party?"

"With Horace away?"

"Well, I think you might have asked me to your dinner to-night instead of Olga. Olga can go out whenever she wants to."

"Now, Violet," said Rosa, "don't begin complaining. You're taken to complaining too much lately. When did you see James last?" she asked Laura.

"I saw him yesterday. I had tea with him and Lilla. It's wonderful the way they manage in those two tiny rooms. Everything is as neat as possible. Cedric was there too, and a painter named Gault. A shadowist or impressionist, I think. I haven't seen his work. He was most entertaining. He had been listening to the orators in the Park, and he gave us an imitation first of a Positivist undertaking to disprove Christianity, and then of a negro revivalist who had just got religion. I laughed till I cried, he was so funny."

"Really, nothing is sacred these days," said Lady Merton-Stuart. "You young people laugh at everything. I think it's shocking." She turned to Rosa. "You don't happen to know of a footman, do you? Henry has boils and I really don't think I can keep him any longer."

"I don't, I'm afraid," said Rosa. "I'm in the throes myself. Grace is leaving me, after all these years. She has to look after her mother, she says. It's always some such excuse."

Then Merson announced Mr., Mrs. and Miss Bonner, and Laura got up to welcome them. It was very good, she thought, of all these people to come and see her, to congratulate her on her fifth wedding anniversary. It was Rosa's idea, for Rosa loved anniversaries of any sort, and though Laura was touched by it she couldn't help feeling that it was all a little trying, for her nerves were very uncertain these days, for reasons best known to herself.

Mrs. Bonner looked like a healthy countrywoman with her apple-red cheeks and big, heavy body. Amelia was growing very like her, and the two women with their fur mantles and bustles and feathered bonnets made little Mr. Bonner look like a small trousered robin.

"What did Mr. Leighton give you, Laura darling?" asked Amelia eagerly. She took an honest and vicarious pleasure in Laura's possessions, and liked to be the first to see any new ones.

Laura displayed the bracelet.

"Oh, what a beauty! Where did it come from? Streeter's? You lucky girl!"

"I want to see the pretty babies," said Mr. Bonner, when the bracelet had been passed round and duly admired. Laura explained that Horatia was in bed, and that Richard might be in at any moment. Just then there was a bustle in the hall and the sound of a child's voice, and Laura ran out of the room and returned with Richard, rosy from the cold. He toddled beside her, holding her hand, not at all shy but smiling broadly upon the company. His face was going to be shaped like Laura's and his eyes were blue like hers. He shook hands with everybody—Laura didn't encourage people to kiss him, for she had a young doctor who warned her of the dangers of kissing—and she presently took him on her knee and gave him a cup of milk. Nothing could have been prettier than the pair of them, Mr. Bonner said. Violet created a diversion by imitating an actress she had just seen, a feat she performed quite creditably. She couldn't bear Laura or anyone else to be the centre of interest, it stung her and made her restless. She knew that Horace didn't like her, and she chose to believe that it was because she could see through him, and he knew it. Hadn't she seen him driving up Bond Street in a hansom with Lady Olleridge, sitting as close as close could be? She had never said a word to Laura about this because she didn't want to make trouble, but one of these days she was going to let Horace know that she knew. Of course there was probably nothing in it, it was just his way of behaving when he was with women, as though he adored them. He had flirted with Violet herself before she began to bore him with her hints that he might do this for her or might do that because her papa gave her hardly any money and Horace was so rich. She knew very well that she had alienated him by being tactless, but she preferred to pretend to herself that it was all because of that penetrating eye of hers that saw into his very soul.

Then Olga came in, dressed in deepest mourning. She had matured, her features were heavier and more pronounced, but she was vivid and attractive, and her mourning dramatized her rather Semitic beauty. She was on her way home from calling on some of Arthur Laurier's relations, and she had stopped to see Richard, of whom she was very fond, and to pick up her aunt, with whom she was staying. Ever since her husband's tragic death while climbing in Switzerland—watching him through glasses she had seen him slip and fall—she had lost all her gaiety and vivacity. She had become tragic, bitter and scoffing, a phase, Laura believed and hoped, that she would outgrow in time. She took a kind of morbid pleasure in shocking people and in ignoring the conventions. She now smoked cigarettes almost constantly—and was the only woman of Laura's acquaintance who did—and even drank, at times, more than was good for her. She had loved Arthur Laurier madly, and contrary to her own and others' expectations her love had increased with each of the three years of their marriage. He was an experienced traveller, had explored parts of Tibet hitherto unknown to Europeans (starting from Ladak and reaching Khotan and the Tarim Basin), had published a widely read book on the Tibetans, was a famous Alpine climber and withal a modest and charming man. He was not at all well off and owned a small country place named Pennyfields which he neglected for the sake of his explorations. Olga's money had restored this, and they were about to give up globe-trotting and make their home there when the tragedy occurred. Olga was like a crazy woman at first, and Laura really feared for her sanity. She was thankful that she was now going about once more, even if it were only with the aid of cigarettes and drink. She now refused tea and asked Merson for a brandy and soda, which she drank thirstily. She then lit a cigarette, watched Richard for a while, and soon signalled to her aunt that she was ready to go home. She took Laura aside for a moment and whispered,

"My God! Our families are enough to drive one to drink. Violet looks at me as if I were going to give her the smallpox, and Aunt Susan as if I were about to grow horns and a tail. I'll try to keep sober till half past eight. Ta ta!"

Mrs. Peddler never came at all. The invalid had had one of his bad days and she couldn't leave him, so she sent word by messenger to this effect. Everyone talked hopefully about a merciful release, but Mr. Peddler had been an invalid for eighteen years and might continue to be one for another ten. When they had all gone, Laura ran upstairs to see Horatia whom she found peacefully asleep, the fever quite gone. A square, unbeautiful child who resembled neither of her parents very closely, but was most like Horace in colouring. She saw Richard have his bath—poor Olga! how she envied her the possession of that boy!—and wondered why it was that he pulled so at her own heartstrings, just as James had always done, and as Horatia, though she loved her, did not. Finally she went to her room to get dressed, not at all looking forward to the evening.

Lady Olleridge was a pretty little blonde with a small plump figure and beautiful ankles and feet which she displayed as much as the long and ample skirts ladies were then wearing would allow. Rich, childless, spoilt, she spent her days in taking care of and adorning her person and in entertaining and being entertained. She went a good deal to race meetings with Lord Olleridge, who was a prominent member of the Turf and Jockey Clubs. For the first three years, when she was not having a baby, Laura had made a valiant fourth, but she loathed race-meetings with a hearty loathing, they bored her increasingly, and she at last made up her mind that it was futile to try to enjoy what she really hated. She thought Lord Olleridge a good-natured nit-wit, but she disliked Lady Olleridge, though she made every effort to disguise the fact, and mistrusted her. She thought her hard and shallow-minded, and though she was certainly intelligent about horses she was intelligent about little else. It was plain, however, that she appealed to something in Horace, that she stimulated and excited him, and she was sometimes amusing in her coarse way. Laura didn't mind the coarseness, for she was no prig (a prig couldn't have lived with Horace at all) and she liked to laugh. But there was something false and veiled and secret about the woman, something rather deadly. Olga felt it too and said, "Why on earth has Horace taken him in as director? I thought he didn't want figure-heads?" No more he did; he was a business man himself and he wanted Leighton and Armytage run by business men, but Lady Olleridge was greedy for money and had got round him.

So there it was, and Laura had to put up with Kitty Olleridge as best she might, all the time feeling that there was a woman who would stop at nothing.

The Lockyers were little changed. Mrs. Lockyer was still very beautiful and Laura rather liked her now that she had got to know her better. She was a poseuse and a snob, but her posing harmed no one, and moreover she was a very fine amateur pianist and not at all shy about performing. Colonel Lockyer was as straight, as stiff, as dull as ever, but he was an astute business man whose talents had been wasted in the army, and he was invaluable to Horace. Sir George Humphreys had been a great friend of Arthur Laurier's and both Olga and Laura loved him dearly. He was a stout man of more than sixty, a fluent and charming talker, and a charming man. He was knowledgeable about all the things that intelligent women like a man to be a little more knowledgeable about than they are themselves. He lived in the same flat Horace had once lived in, in the Albany, and had filled it with fine old pictures and William and Mary furniture (which was now being eagerly sought, along with Queen Anne furniture and anything earlier that was obtainable, by people who were sick of carved ebony and fumed oak and bric-à-brac and false Japanese and the "artistic"). He had a great pity for Olga, whose agony he knew and understood, and a great tenderness for Laura. In fact in a calm, reasonable and middle-aged way he was in love with Laura, but kept his fondness perfectly within bounds.

The dinner table was gay with silver (Horace's family silver) and chrysanthemums. Laura had an invaluable ally in Merson—she was very fortunate, she realized, to have two such firm friends as Merson and Stubbs—for he took things into his own hands as a good butler should and only wished to know how many people were coming to dine and who they were.

The little dinner went off very well. There was talk about trouble with the Dacoits in Burmah— Oh, these far-flung empires and the difficulties thereof!—and trouble with the Crofters in the Hebrides, though no one bothered very much about that, and some talk about books, and how unpleasant (this was Lady Olleridge) realistic books always were, whereupon Sir George Humphreys said with a laugh that nothing showed the real pessimism of the nineteenth century better than the fact that anything "realistic" was always unpleasant and anything unpleasant was generally admitted to be "realistic." People spent their time, he said, trying to ignore facts. After all, wasn't there something intensely respectable about a fact?

"Today only the Frenchman or the Russian," he said, "dares to try to hold the mirror up out of the sugar basin, much less up to anything which is agreed to be as nasty as life."

This started a discussion in which Horace took Lady Olleridge's part, as no one else seemed likely to do so, and the other women agreed with Sir George. Colonel Lockyer and Lord Olleridge didn't read books and were not interested in art, so they said nothing. Olga was feverishly talkative and drank a good deal of champagne. Laura kept a rather worried eye on her and once, unseen, shook her head at Merson as he was about to fill up her glass again. He understood. Everyone felt sorry for Mrs. Laurier, whose grief was eating into her very soul.

After dinner Mrs. Lockyer sat down at the piano and played for them for some time. She was a Chopin enthusiast, and went from one Etude to another. She wore a long, clinging dress of bright, deep blue, the hem embroidered with gold flowers. It was girdled beneath the breast with gold bands, and when she walked the skirt dragged heavily about her feet. A curious woman, Laura thought, and wondered if she were faithful to Colonel Lockyer. He sat in an armchair smoking a long cigar—Laura permitted smoking anywhere in the house—and looking at nothing. "He's such a dry stick of a man," she said to herself. His dry, thin lips under his military moustache were quite expressionless, his eyes seemed to have a dry film over them, and the nostrils of his finely modelled nose were thin and motionless. She looked at Horace, who hated listening to music and had retired to an alcove with Kitty Olleridge, where he was whispering and laughing silently. How handsome he was, and what a contrast to Colonel Lockyer! He was full-bodied, full-blooded, vital, given to gusty passions, attractive to Laura with a strong, inevitable attraction as if he conformed to a pattern that had been forming in her mind from the beginning of time. She loved him and wished to God she had never seen his faults. And Horace could bear no criticism, spoken or implied. That vivid ego that lived in him could do no wrong. What he had loved in her was her adoration of himself, and at the faintest hint that her adoration was mingled or tempered with criticism, he felt himself to be an injured man. No, Horace could do no wrong. He looked upon her, she thought, as a decorative mirror which gave back a pleasing picture of himself. If the picture he saw in it were at times less pleasing it was the fault of the glass. Life had been too kind to him. He went his way gaily and confidently, meeting no rebuffs.

"Only papa ever turned his back on him," Laura thought, "and that was for the most stupid of reasons. Otherwise I could almost admire papa for it."

Olga looked at the two in the alcove, and raised an eyebrow at Laura, who gave her back a flicker of a smile. She turned her face away from them and looked at Sir George instead— "Our mutual flirt," as Olga called him. What a dear he was! So kind, so understanding, so ripely human. The two friends liked sharing his devotion, they often said that he was one of the very pleasantest things in their lives, and Laura got from him the affectionate interest she had longed to get from Horace, and longed in vain. She tried hard to take a philosophical view of matrimony.

"After five years," she thought, "all marriages are probably much the same. Olga's might have been different because Arthur Laurier was different. That's why it's so tragic that he had to die."

Mrs. Lockyer's playing made her feel thoughtful and at moments sentimental. She tried to imagine for herself a perfect mate who would give her his entire confidence and devotion and to whom she would give hers in return. Someone who looked like Horace as Horace had looked five years ago, but with all his vitality, and his keen interest directed toward something that she too could care deeply about. For she couldn't love Leighton and Armytage, try as she might. She could have liked any other business but that one. James had thoroughly infected her with his hatred of war and of everything connected with war. To continue to settle political differences by wholesale murder seemed to her intolerably, unutterably stupid. All that belonged to the dark, or darker ages and surely it was time we emerged from these into the light. She connected this wholesale shedding of blood with pagan ideas, pagan ritual and pagan sacrifice. For surely the fact that a great many men died at the bidding of their governors or rulers didn't make a thing right or wrong. Didn't, in fact, affect it at all. No, there was some awful, bloody, age-old idea at the back of it all, an idea that died hard. Blood poured out upon the ground had had a meaning for man since the beginning of time, since the dawn of history. The god sacrificed; sacrifices to the god. Blood, to the barbarous and twilit mind, had mystic properties. The Christian religion upheld the idea. Indeed, the countries that most fervently embraced Christianity were little more averse to blood-letting than the others. And Horace couldn't see that, wouldn't see it. He sometimes went to church as an example to the children and the servants, and although he had always known her feelings about organized religion—she had told him all about it before he proposed to her—he now scolded her for never going with him. Before he proposed to her—that started another chain of thought. How strange it was, that proposal, when one looked back on it! Horace coming tip-toeing into the dark room to her, Olga appearing at the door with her candle, his quick recovery and command of the situation and his announcement. Would he have spoken then if Olga had not surprised them? Would he ever have spoken? Laura often wondered.

Olga got up when Mrs. Lockyer would play no more and said she must go. Horace and Lady Olleridge came out of the alcove and the party broke up. The Lowenthals asked Olga if they might take her home, but she explained that she had told Sir George Humphreys that he might, and thanked them for their kindness. The Lowenthals pressed both Olga and Laura to come and see their pictures —they had Manets and Monets and a new Degas, and several little paintings by the unfortunate Sisley, whom they believed in and tried to help. People laughed at their collection and thought them crazy for buying the "Impressionists," but they paid no heed to them. When they had all gone, Horace said, pouring himself out a drink;

"Kitty wants us to spend Christmas with them at Pentlands. I said we would. I thought you'd like it. The children can come too, she says. She's going to write to you about it."

"Do you want to go?" asked Laura. It was the first time he had called Lady Olleridge Kitty. Laura supposed she also would have to now.

"Yes, very much. Don't you?"

She hesitated, moved to speak the truth, but thinking better of it.

"I don't mind. Only I'm always terrified the children will catch something when we stay in other people's houses."

"Well, I don't intend that my life shall be regulated by the children and their possible illnesses. I wish you'd be a little more polite to Kitty. It's perfectly plain that you don't like her."

"Oh, Horace, no! Is it? I thought I was the perfect hostess. Why did she say that, and when?"

"My dear, you know very well you don't try to hide your dislike. Do remember that Olleridge is associated with me now, and I want everything to be as friendly as possible. If you can stomach the Lowenthals I don't see why you can't like the Olleridges."

"But I like the Lowenthals immensely. I think they're charming. You see, I really like Jews, and you only want to make use of them."

He ignored this. "I'm sorry to have to say it, but I don't think you're trying to help me as you should. Must all the effort be on my side? It seems to me you don't do very much for me considering what I do for you."

"Don't I, Horace? I run your house as well as I can, I bear and bring up your children, I entertain your friends, I try to be a satisfactory wife. You're in a complaining mood. Please kiss me and stop saying unkind things."

She put her arms about his neck and smiled at him. His kiss was perfunctory and she released herself quickly.

"Good-night. I expect I shall be asleep by the time you come upstairs." She ran out of the room, controlling a desire to slam the door. She was only twenty-five, though sometimes she felt forty; but on the other hand she often felt like a child, and longed to act childishly. She went to her room hating Kitty Olleridge. She had managed to persuade Horace that she, Laura, disliked her and showed it, was jealous of her, no doubt. It was true that she disliked her, but the other woman had merely felt her dislike, divined it, as women do. She had certainly not shown it in any way. Christmas—it would be very unpleasant. Lady Olleridge was a *faux bonhomme* and would convince Horace that she was the most forgiving and large-hearted of women, while his wife was full of petty meannesses.

"I know the breed," Laura said to herself. "And we might have gone to Pennyfields for Christmas, with Olga."

As she undressed some tears came to her eyes, but were not shed. She had been crying too much, lately. People would begin to notice it soon. She thought of the high hopes with which she had married. She had so loved Horace, loved him, loved him. She had so longed to help James, too, but he had never accepted one penny of Horace's money from her, even as a loan, and very rarely set foot in the house. Those kindly and loving intentions were high on a shelf, rotting under the dust.

She got quickly into bed, but Horace came up almost at once, confessed to having been in a bad temper all day, and showered caresses on her so that for a while she was wildly happy and took him completely to her heart again, telling him how she adored him and what he meant to her. But when he slept she lay awake, and her doubts and her dread of failure and her uneasiness returned stealthily on soft, light, cat-like feet, and tortured her for a long two hours.

CHAPTER IX

What struck Laura very forcibly at this time—it was now early spring, 1888—was that while life was the curious, interesting, perilous, difficult, heart-breaking compromise it had always been, a great many people—journalists and writers of fiction were the worst offenders—kept insisting that it wasn't anything of the sort, but was something clear, beautiful, simple and noble, especially if the liver were fortunate enough to reside in Great Britain or the dependencies. Nothing unpleasant was ever supposed to happen to nice, jolly people with good connections, and if certain persons got into trouble or were very unhappy it was usually through some grave and un-British flaw in their characters. A play was condemned by the press because it concerned a woman who was "criminally" in love with a young man who was already married. This was an un-English state of affairs, and could not be expected to awaken any response in British breasts. Foreigners might get into these scrapes because foreigners were foreigners and unbalanced, but you had only to read *Punch* and the current fiction to know that such things did not happen to normal persons in the "right little tight little island." This was a view Laura couldn't share, and she found it increasingly irritating. She herself was obliged to pretend to a great many people that she was one of the happiest of wives and that to have a home, a husband and two children was all that any reasonable person could ask for. The children were indeed a very great satisfaction to her and they gave her surprisingly little trouble. Horatia had measles at five, and the next year they both had whooping cough, but, except for these and for colds, the maladies that attacked most children passed them by. The things that Laura enjoyed most at this time, apart from the children, were reading and being at Pennyfields with Olga. Pennyfields was a simple, nondescript, unpretentious house of grey stone two stories in height and on many different levels. It was in a pretty part of Essex, and lay among small woods like a shy and couchant animal. From their earliest childhood, Richard and Horatia learnt to know and name the wild-flowers that grew in those miniature forests of young oaks and birches, and in the grassy rides cut through them. Olga, whose emotional or sexual life seemed to have completely stopped with the death of Arthur Laurier, concentrated now upon Richard and Horatia, and upon their mother. She and Laura had one of those deep and confident friendships that are rare among women. Olga was no longer the dashing, foolish, light-hearted little heiress but a sad, bitter, rebellious yet affectionate woman. Her tremendous interest in men, the bright curious darting interest of the young girl, had left her for ever. She had found the perfect companion, the perfect friend and lover, and had seen him fall to his death through the lenses of the excellent German glasses he had just given her—a tiny picture of a tiny, falling figure, no bigger than a small fly, which was to remain with her for ever.

She and Laura exchanged confidences as women do (with clear consciences) but men never, and Olga knew as much about Laura's marriage as Laura herself, and perhaps more, for she could see Horace disinterestedly and dispassionately, which Laura could not. Horace's interests were becoming more and more scattered. He was less and less at home. From the first moment that he had seen a look in Laura's eyes that suggested criticism of himself, his good opinion of her began to fail. She was less perceptive, less appreciative, less worthy of his trust and esteem than he had at first believed. When she took him gently to task for seeing so much of Lady Olleridge, and so publicly, he realized that his wife was a woman with grave flaws of character. He wanted to be blindly, unquestioningly worshipped, and was shocked and startled by this new attitude. He would not, he could not be put in the wrong, and a woman who could so mistrust him (no matter what grounds there might be for this mistrust) was not the woman he could continue to love. The fact that he had married her without a settlement came up, as it had before and would do again, and he soon believed that he had a genuine grievance against her for gross ingratitude. Ingratitude was a great sin, he told her, one of the worst and meanest of all the sins.

"Worse than adultery?" she asked him, turning away. And then the storm broke over her head.

"It's quite impossible to discuss anything calmly with Horace," she told Olga afterwards. "It would be such a relief if he would tell me what his feelings are for Kitty Olleridge and what he feels about me, but he becomes so indignant at the mere suggestion that there is or might be anything between them that we simply cannot talk about it." She regretted her use of that word, however. She had given him real cause for annoyance, because it was after all just possible—though unlikely—that this affair with Kitty Olleridge was quite innocent. (A ridiculous word, she thought, to use in connection with that lady, or with Horace either, for that matter.) Common sense told her that it was not innocent, that Horace was not at all the sort of man to be fobbed off with smiles and an occasional kiss by a woman with whom he spent so much of his time and with whom he was on such intimate terms. It was all part of her general disillusionment and unhappiness, and sometimes seemed an unimportant part, but nevertheless she hated to think that Horace was lying to her.

In March they went again to stay at Pentlands, leaving the children and the nurse at Pennyfields with Olga. Horace was in high spirits, for he had just signed a contract with a representative of a foreign power for the biggest shipment of arms ever sent out by Leighton and Armytage. The first night of their stay they played childish games after dinner; thought reading, hunt the thimble, drawing-room tennis with Japanese fans and air balloons, blowing a feather across a sheet which they all held stretched out between them. Laura had never before seen Horace in such a boisterous mood. He was like a schoolboy, and full of zest, while Kitty Olleridge's shrill, excited laugh could be heard above everything. Grace Lockyer was there, looking, as always, a little aloof and distrait. She invariably gave Laura the impression of wishing she were somewhere else, but as she wore this look even in her own home, Laura concluded it was merely her manner, and was native and natural to her. Colonel Lockyer was in Germany, on some business connected with the firm, and there were ten or twelve other people staying in the house, none of whom Laura found particularly attractive or particularly interesting. She watched Fred Olleridge very closely to see if she could detect any sign of anxiety or disapproval at the degree of intimacy displayed by his wife and her husband, but he appeared to see nothing wrong, and his manner to Horace was perfectly friendly, even affectionate.

She went upstairs at eleven, Grace Lockyer, dressed in the "artistic" style she still affected, accompanying her as far as her door. There was a bright fire burning in her room and her nightdress and slippers were warming beside it. She tried to undo the hooks of her dress—a handsome, new Worth model, made of black Chantilly lace—but she could reach only a few of them. She was obliged to ring for Stubbs, who had evidently been waiting, for she came up at once. She had a plain and very intelligent face with small observant eyes, and an expression of great determination. She was obviously a vigorous and strong-willed person with a character perfectly set and formed. Her body was bony and angular and she was above the average height. Her neatness was almost excessive. Laura loved Stubbs as she loved few people, and trusted her entirely. While not at all given to confidences (except to Olga) she was not sorry that Stubbs knew nearly all there was to know about her, which she did by means of an intuition founded on deep affection and by possessing a pair of very shrewd and seeing eyes. She could tell fortunes in tea leaves with uncanny accuracy, a gift that it amused both Olga and Laura to exploit from time to time. She came in looking serious, even gloomy, as though she were full of secrets and prophecies, but Laura knew that she was no fonder of staying at Pentlands than she was herself, and put it down to that.

"Only two days more," she told her, "and then we go down to Pennyfields, where I hope we shall be till after Easter."

"I've been looking in the tea-cups," said Stubbs, undoing the last hooks. "Two great rulers are going to die."

"How can you possibly tell? What did you see?"

"I saw the death of a man with a crown above his head and tears and mourning all about him. He was very old. There was a sick man by his bed and there was a crown about his head, too, but it won't be there for long."

"Stubbs, you really are rather frightening sometimes. But haven't you been reading the papers? They're full of the old German Emperor's illness."

"I didn't read about these deaths in the papers, because they haven't happened yet. Both of them will die, the younger as well as the older. I'll give your hair a good brushing if you'll sit down."

"Do you mean to say that the old Emperor and the Crown Prince are both going to die?"

"I saw two great rulers, I can't say more than that."

"But the Crown Prince isn't dangerously ill. It's just some trouble with his throat. He was at San Remo when I was there on my honeymoon. We often used to see him."

"He'll be dead soon."

"If you're right this time it really will be rather impressive."

"I told you Master Richard would be a boy four months before he came."

Laura submitted her head to the brush.

"I know you did. But the chances are even, there, so it isn't so remarkable."

"Well, I'm only telling you. It's nothing to me whether the German Emperor dies or not, nor any other ruler except our Queen. I'm going to get a letter from my brother Edward soon, too. There's a letter waiting for me in London now, more than likely."

"Will it have good news in it?"

"Yes, it'll be good news."

"I'm glad of that. Have you seen anything about me lately?"

"Yes. Will you hold your head quite still, please? I might get the brush in your eye."

"Well, tell me what it was."

"I'm not one to tell lies, and so I'm not going to say any more."

"Was it bad, then? It must have been."

"That depends. No, not as you'd say bad. But you won't like it much."

"You'd better tell me, Stubbs. Please. It will worry me."

"No, not to-night. It's nothing bad, really bad. It's just something you've been expecting, in a way."

"I think you're most exasperating."

"You need some new nightdresses. You've had none made for over a year."

"I'll see to it when we get back to London. Has it anything to do with the children?"

"Now, do you suppose I'd have said anything about it at all if it had been? It's just a little trouble you've been expecting, I'm telling you." She ran her hand into the bed to see if the stone hot water bottle were doing its duty. "There, I'll leave you now. Good-night, ma'am."

The sibyl went out, closing the door, and Laura lay in bed in the dark and wondered at her prophecies. She was so often right or nearly right that it was impossible to dismiss what she said entirely. She had evidently wanted to prepare her for something, but whether she had seen that something at the bottom of a tea-cup or in some other way she had no means of knowing. She fell asleep, for how long she had no idea, and then woke suddenly to find that her clock had stopped at a little after eleven. Horace had not yet come up, unless he had gone to bed in his dressing-room, which was unlikely. She lit her candle and slipping on her dressing-gown went into the next room to see. He was not there, and the house seemed absolutely still. She wondered if the men had come upstairs yet, and going to the door, she listened to a silence that seemed eternal. There was a feeble night-light burning on a table in the hall, and its faint beams were just sufficient to show the flight of shallow steps at the far end that led up into another wing where Lord and Lady Olleridge's bedrooms were. And then, suddenly and soundlessly, Horace appeared at the top of these steps, descended them cautiously, and advanced along the hall toward her with the light, prancing step of a satisfied and furtive male. At the first sight of him she had closed the door until there was only a crack for her to look through, and she now shut it entirely, taking as much care to make no sound as Horace himself. She crossed the room and sat down on the edge of the bed, feeling suddenly weak with the shock of what she had seen. She sat there motionless, one hand pressed to her heart, the other holding round her the folds of her blue dressing-gown. She could hear Horace moving cautiously about in the next room, speedily preparing himself for bed, and thinking, doubtless, how fortunate he was to have reached his room without discovery. She sat staring at the door. She knew now. How did it alter the situation? What was she to do? Should she speak to him, and tell him what she had seen? Play the miserable and humiliating part of the jealous wife? It wasn't jealousy she felt now, she was beyond that. In the beginning, seeing how Horace was attracted to Lady Olleridge, she had sunk in her own self-esteem, which was at all times moderate, and had told over and over to herself, like a painful rosary, the story of her own imperfections, her own failings. It wasn't that Lady Olleridge was, in any degree, what she wished to be herself, but that she herself fell so far below that self she should have been and wanted to be. She had grown, the year before, noticeably thinner with worry and unhappiness, but Olga and Sir George Humphreys, acting, unknown to her, in loving collusion, had helped to restore her confidence in herself. A rose is no less a rose because an observer thinks it a cabbage, or fails to see it at all, was the sum of their argument. All very well, unless the observer happens to be the loved one. There was no answer to that. But time and custom did the most. One gets used to a thing, however hateful. And there was always the possibility that Horace, however much he neglected her, wasn't seriously involved with Lady Olleridge. But now she knew. Well, wasn't it better so? Better, much better, to know? There remained the problem of what she should do, now that there was no more room for doubt. Say nothing, condone? Surely that wasn't right? A husband would never do that, why should a wife? Curious, that resentment toward her that she was sometimes aware of in Horace. Not for the first time, she let her mind run back six years. There was always the possibility that he had never meant to say anything about marriage, that he had been neatly trapped by Olga, who had appeared in all innocence, candle in hand, and forced his declaration. It was possible that he had come tip-toeing into her room that night merely for a kiss. "I shall do no harm," Laura sometimes imagined him saying to himself. If it had not been for her determination to marry him with or without her father's consent, would he have persisted? She remembered how he had said, "I don't want to come between you and your parents." But as long as she had blindly adored him (it took her three years to see a fault in him) all had gone tolerably well.

She turned and tossed till morning, slept for two or three hours, was awakened by Stubbs with her tea, and feeling too miserable to face the day, to say nothing of Horace and

Lady Olleridge, stayed in bed till lunch time. That lady had gone out for a day's hunting, she presently learned, with some of her guests, and Horace had gone to the meet with Lord Olleridge in a tandem. She had the house to herself in the afternoon, even Mrs. Lockyer having decided to go out on some expedition or other. By dinner time she had made up her mind to tell Horace what she knew, and did so with admirable calm and self-control when he came upstairs to dress. He denied everything, with a great show of indignation and displeasure. He had sat up late talking with Olleridge, and had then gone up with him as far as his room. He was returning from there when she spied him.

"Soon after you came up," Laura said, "I heard the big clock downstairs strike four."

"What of that?" He met her eyes with his own bold, lively, unfeeling brown ones, eyes in which she could no longer penetrate below the surface. So he had married a jealous, spying wife? He had had a good deal to put up with in one way and another, and this was the climax. And the only reply she got to her question, "Horace, only tell me this, I only ask you this; do you love her?" was the cold and injured look he gave her and the shutting of the door between his room and hers.

That was the beginning of a long coldness, a long separation, though outwardly nothing was changed. It came, Laura supposed, to this; Horace wished her to understand that if she guessed he had a mistress, it was her duty to keep up appearances and say nothing.

"And what else can I do?" she asked Olga. "I must think of the children. I'm entirely dependent on him. And I would never, never go back to papa even supposing that he would have me."

"No, you can't do that," Olga agreed. They didn't think too well of men at that time, those two. The only exceptions they admitted were Arthur, who was all that a man should be and so was taken by the jealous gods, James, who was a dear and a genius—he was not a whit less beloved by Laura since he had taken a wife—and Sir George Humphreys. Sir George, indeed, came into his own as friend and comforter. He had a gift for explaining and clarifying situations, his common sense alone made him a friend to value, and he was invariably amiable and consoling. He spent much time at Pennyfields, and very often James and Lilla were there too, and the queer rift that Laura's marriage had made between herself and her brother, vanished. James knew that she was unhappy and was sorry, but to be unhappy with Horace seemed to him a far better thing than to be happy with him. And on those frequent visits to Pennyfields when Horace was away or very much occupied, Laura tried, with patience and philosophy, to do without the husband she had once so wildly loved.

How important, anyway, was this business of love, she and Olga asked each other? (It wasn't called sex then. People spoke of the sexes but not of sex. They spoke of love.) Of minor importance, Laura maintained, and thought she spoke the truth. Of major importance, said Olga. Life was an empty husk without it. The first had suffered disillusion, the second had had her love snatched from her while it was still in its first flower. They agreed that the love of children and mental activity were both important, though Olga did not feel the urgent need of something for her mind to feed upon that Laura did. Games and sports were of little moment to either, though now that bicycling had come in they both learnt to ride—

bicycles were of course a great improvement on the old three-wheeled cycles—and enjoyed little expeditions to nearby villages. But it was pleasanter still, they agreed, to drive about the country lanes with the children in the little governess cart drawn by a fat and lazy pony.

Amelia Bonner had married a painter of Royal Academy successes—the Bonners' house had always been a rendezvous for the more comfortable artists. Mr. Wardle, Amelia's husband, rode into fame on a powerful wave when he painted a picture called "Companions"—a pretty, fair-haired child in a pink dress, her arms about the neck of a great St. Bernard dog, between whose paws lay a fluffy kitten. He and Amelia lived in a house on Campden Hill and were always at home on Sunday afternoons. A growing distaste for platitudes kept Laura away, and the friendship waned. Violet was still at home, still unmarried, very uncertain of temper and very restless. Emmie Trueman, her husband and her four children were in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Emmie, who had been there two years now, still called Nova Scotia America. "I like America very much, though the winters are dreadfully cold," she wrote to Laura. "That's a regular little addle-pate," Laura remarked to Olga, "but she used to receive James's letters for me in the old days, so I am still fond of her, and the same applies to Amelia, but oh, dear, how one has grown away from them!"

In 1889 Mr. Gladstone was seventy-nine and still going strong. There was trouble in Egypt again and a soldier named Colonel Kitchener was much talked of, as was a certain Osman Dinga who was causing the trouble. That year the first submarine was launched. It was designed and built by Lieutenant Peral of Spain and could remain under water for three-quarters of an hour. The British authorities, upon investigation, decided not to adopt this type of vessel. There were rumbles and rumours from the Transvaal, and Kruger's hostility to England increased. Thanks to Great Britain, the Zulus were no longer a menace to the Boer burghers, and it had cost those gentlemen nothing either in lives or money. In America Cleveland was President, to be followed that same year by Benjamin Harrison. Laura read an article dealing with American progress in which she learned that the value of the meat-packing industries had increased to five hundred and sixty-four million dollars per year; that the output of pig iron now surpassed that of Great Britain; that wooden sailing vessels were being replaced by steel ships on the Great Lakes, and that in the last ten years just ended America had opened her friendly if careless arms to five and a quarter million immigrants. She was greatly impressed. Edward Stubbs had just been made superintendent of a very small branch line in Northern California at a salary that made his sister gasp; and he meant to rise higher. He wrote to her about the McKinley Tariff Act, the Silver Convention and the American Federation of Labor, which took the place of the old Knights of Labor, in which he was keenly interested, and Laura read his letters with constantly increasing admiration. In one of them he said, "Soon I'll be able to send you enough money so that you won't have to be anybody's servant for the rest of your life."

Laura said, "Shall you want to leave me then, Stubbs, as soon as you can afford to?"

"I'll leave you," Stubbs said quietly, "when you send me away and not before."

Laura, Olga, the two children, and a nurse went in September, 1890, to Aix-les-Bains where they had rented a villa. Lady Merton-Stuart was to have joined them, sharing expenses, but she was prevented from going by the premature accouchement of her daughter Helen, who was about to be delivered of her eighth child.

Although England and France had now no quarrel in Europe, they were constantly meeting in far-away parts of the globe and sniffing suspiciously at one another. The English were not over-popular just then in France, and Laura and Olga had noticed this on their way through Paris where they spent several days. It hurt them not a little, as they were both ready to adore France and the French. They thought they would like to live there, had it not meant abandoning Pennyfields. London had no great charms for either of them just then.

"Social life in London means the Olleridges for me," Laura said, "for Horace insists on my inviting that woman to the house whenever we entertain, and on my accepting her hospitality whenever she proffers it."

"I believe I made that match," Olga said. "I egged you on, and lauded Horace to the skies. Though I think I told you once that he wouldn't be faithful. I wonder if it will ever be possible for women to obtain divorces without being made to feel outcasts and sinners?"

"Some day, I expect, when we're dead," said Laura. "But I can *prove* nothing, unless I put private inquiry agents on his track, and even so I would have to prove cruelty as well, and that would be still more impossible. Horace could never be cruel in the sense they mean, though heaven knows he has made me suffer. Besides, I don't want a divorce."

"You must be patient," advised Olga, "and give him plenty of rope."

"Well, my dear," said Laura, "don't I give him all the rope there is?" She added, "He goes to shoot with the

Olleridges in Scotland tomorrow. What more could he want? And Fred Olleridge notices nothing."

"Do you think him stupid or merely blind where his wife is concerned?"

"Both," replied Laura.

She thought, and Olga agreed, that it would be delightful if James and Lilla could come and stay with them in Aix, and she wrote to James to this effect, enclosing at the same time a cheque for travelling expenses which she implored him to accept. He had never been out of England, and although it was true of James that his mind "was its own place," and could make "a hell of heaven, a heaven of hell," she nevertheless hated the thought that she could see other countries and fresh scenes and he could not. He had not been well and it was Lilla who eventually persuaded him to come. "The children," as Olga called them, set out with a few pieces of hand luggage, and arrived in Aix in the second week of September, having travelled third class, contrary to Laura's instructions. The weather was hot and fine, snowy Alps lost themselves in the blue of the sky, the nearer mountains threw up lovely shapes, one against the other, all beautiful and all different, and in the green valleys between them were spread sheets of pale mauve autumn crocuses.

The only mountains James had ever seen were the mountains of the English Lake District where he had once gone on a walking tour with Cedric Jackson, and Laura could see the thoughts that these new beauties gave him simmering in his head. They took the little mountain railway up to Mont Revard and he lay for hours on the edge of the mountain looking into an incomparable panorama veiled in delicate blue. He and Lilla went up there very often, taking a sandwich lunch with them, and Lilla, who had hardly been out of London, was as excited as a slum child on its first trip to the sea. They were like a pair of birds in their relations to each other, accepting each other entirely, as children do. Lilla attracted a good deal of attention wherever she went. She wore her masses of fair, shining hair in a large chignon, and cut across her forehead in a straight fringe. She made her own clothes, such as she had, and they were usually very bright in colour. She was delicately made, with fine, small limbs and hands as delicate as birds' claws, and her voice was a clear, light treble. She and James had been married seven years and had suffered many hardships, but nothing could destroy or diminish their delight in each other. In the third year, Lilla had a baby, but it died at the age of three months, in spite of everything Rosa and Laura and two doctors could do to save it. James wrote a poem soon after this which he called "The World Dismissed." He liked to think of his baby as having looked upon the world and then having spurned, rejected it, and so he wrote his poem, which Laura could never read without the tears springing to her eyes. The critics spoke of James as another Marlowe, and it increased his reputation.

Lilla seemed to have a double vision. She saw through her own eager eyes a varied and engrossing world. She was never troubled with problems; she didn't see them. She had her own instinctive beliefs—though belief was perhaps too heavy a word to describe her consciousness that she and James and every living thing and person were being loved and watched and guided by a Being who was infinitely benevolent and powerful. To James these were the imaginings of a child, too delicate, too sweet and too personal to destroy. They were, to Lilla, what colour is to a flower. But on the other hand Lilla could see also through

James's weary and penetrating eyes. She knew that the world in which she rejoiced seemed to him crazed, tragic, blood-stained, like a bewildering and evil dream, and that he disliked the thought of being involved in it. Such happiness as he had came from nature, and from her, and from the visions that dwelt with him, visions that bore fruit as poems whose birth pangs gave him the sharpest delight that he could ever know.

Lac Bourget smiled all day, placid, flower-blue, and Lilla begged to be allowed to bathe in it. She had never bathed in sea or lake, and it was an experience for which she longed. She entreated Laura to let her cut up a blue serge frock she had just given her, to make a bathing dress, but Laura wouldn't hear of this and took her instead to the shops in Aix where they found a suitable costume with a skirt coming half-way between knee and ankle, sleeves buttoning at the wrist and collar fastening with hooks about the neck. It was meant for a girl of fourteen but fitted the fairy-like Lilla well enough. With black woollen stockings and canvas shoes her outfit was complete. Laura and Olga, who loved to give her pleasure, decided to have a picnic by the edge of the lake, so they hired a carriage and taking the children with them and a large picnic basket, drove to Petit Port, Horatia sitting on James's knee while Richard sat on Laura's. Olga very much wanted Richard on her knee but he preferred his mother's, whereat Olga made a little grimace and pretended to be put out. Both women adored Richard, who was indeed an admirable child, with a firm, straight little body and a head and face of great beauty. He asked innumerable questions, had already a well developed sense of humour and an affectionate and open nature. Horatia was square and stolid, with a thick nose, thick lips and small brown eyes. Her hair was long and pretty and fell in natural ringlets. She had no colour, although she seemed perfectly healthy, and was reserved and quiet and not given to laughter. She liked serious games, knew her Bible history astonishingly well and had, Laura said, a morbid fondness for dolls. She looked very like Horace's sister Maud and not at all like Laura or any of Laura's family, all of whom possessed more than average good looks. Even Harry had been in his youth a striking figure with his long, elegant body and small head, and his features were excellent. He and Rosa and Violet were at present at Brighton which they preferred to any other resort. The four adults in the carriage talked guardedly about them as they drove to Petit Port. Rosa had gone through a period of acute misery and depression almost amounting to melancholia, when she had seemed to hate the sight of every member of her family and Harry in particular. In fact she had made his existence as unhappy as, in James's opinion, it deserved to be. But she was better now, her health had improved and her good nature and placidity had returned. Stubbornly they kept the house in Kensington Square and would not let it go, although it was too big and too expensive for them. They still hoped that Violet would marry well, but it was beginning to look as if she would never marry at all. She was twenty-six and although no less pretty than she had been at eighteen she managed to spoil her own chances with fateful certainty. As soon as she was alone with an eligible man, which was all too seldom, it went to her head and she threw caution to the winds and fell into his arms. Instead of keeping her kisses to seal a compact as wiser girls did, Violet, passionate and hasty, gave them away for nothing with an abandon absolutely frightening to the sort of young men with whom she came in contact. They thought her fast and dangerous, or they took as much as she would give and sniggered about her with their male companions. She made eyes, was incredibly arch and flirtatious, and while silent and languid in company, awoke with surprising abruptness whenever she found herself alone with a person of the opposite sex. Embraces promptly followed, Violet pretending to be the victim of a frightful and fatal passion.

"I had to see you alone. You don't know what I've suffered. What is there about you that makes me feel this? I lay awake all night, thinking about you. It's fate. The moment I saw you I knew this would happen."

Inevitably such scenes occurred. Wild, wild kisses were exchanged, Violet half swooning with the ardour of her love. "You must go now. I'm so weak. I love you so. I daren't trust myself." And pretending that her mother or father might come in—always a likely enough eventuality—she would send her dazed caller away and rush up to her room to rearrange her hair, looking at her own bright eyes and flaming cheeks with approval.

"I must see him again soon. I'll write him a note. I believe I ought to have been an actress. Moments like that are lovely. I'd die if I didn't have them."

It didn't take the young men long as a rule, to find out that kisses and exclamations were all they were likely to get from this flaming girl, and they presently stayed away and called her names among themselves, for they understood her no better than she understood them.

She endured her parents, for they clothed and fed her, but she loved them not at all and bickered with Rosa until that lady would burst into tears and go away to weep in her room. Harry, whose favourite she had always been, was now sour toward her, for he wanted her to marry Mr. Blakeney, the curate, who still remained unwed. Mr.

Blakeney had a little money of his own and influential relations—one of them a bishop—and Harry thought the match perfectly suitable and desirable. But Violet still dreamed of better things, though she had no idea at all how to set about attaining them.

Laura and Olga knew what Violet's difficulties were, but saw no way of alleviating them. Laura often had her to stay, and she sometimes went to Pennyfields, but without men she was dull and spiritless and with men impossible.

"She'll improve when she marries," Laura said. "That is, provided she marries the right sort of man."

"Girls' dreams," said James, "are always of the man they are going to marry; boys' of what they are going to be. When a man's dreams are over he has begun to die, but when a girl's dreams are over she has begun to live."

"It's not true of me," said Lilla, looking at him as she always looked at him—as though the time she had to love him in was all too short. "I'm living my dream."

"Nothing is ever true of you," he replied, "that isn't said about you, and said by me."

"You absurd creatures!" said Olga. "But what do you feel about Violet, Lilla? She's been horrid to you. What sort of fate would you choose for her?"

Lilla considered for a moment. Her small, pale face with its aureole of loose, fair hair took on a pensive look.

"I'd like to see Violet beautifully dressed in the height of fashion and the mistress of a beautiful house with servants and horses and carriages and gardens full of flowers. She's like a flower herself planted in a pot that's too small for it. She can't grow."

"There's no end to your charity," Olga remarked, "or to your imaginative powers. What Violet really needs is to be laid over someone's knee and well spanked."

Richard shouted with laughter at the idea of his Aunt Violet being spanked, and Laura shook a warning head at Olga, for it was easy to forget those listening ears, and one could never be sure how much they forgot and how much they remembered.

"Oh, you little laughing cherub!" cried the infatuated Olga, and snatched him from Laura's lap and held him in her arms. "Why wouldn't you come to your Aunt Olga when she asked you? Don't you love her? You know you do!"

The boy regarded her with delicious roguery.

"What's a cherub?" he asked, and began playing with the gold watch that was suspended from the front of her dress by a lover's knot of brilliants.

A sudden wave of happiness flooded Laura's heart. What did it matter about Horace and Kitty Olleridge? What did she care? She had her darling children, her charming and devoted friend, her beloved brother (to whom, sometimes, she was able to give pleasure, and to give James pleasure made her heart glow with satisfaction), and her quaint, unworldly sister-in-law, of whom she had grown so fond. How dared she ask for more?

James was trying, with infinite patience, to correct Lilla's Cockney accent.

"Not lyke, dearest, layke. Lake. Say after me, lake, tame, say, ray, bay, game, hay, may, blame, fame, train, shame—no, that wasn't good. Shame, shame, shame—that's it. You see you can when you try."

"Oh, my darling, I do try. I will remember. You speak so beautifully. Why can't I?"

"You do, Lilla, in your own way. Perhaps it's silly to try to change it. Why should I want you to be like all of us when you're so adorably different?"

"But, James, I want to learn. I must learn."

"What did you call me then?" With an attempt at sternness.

"James. Oh, James. Is that better?"

"Any accent sounds charming with a complexion and hair like yours, Lilla," said Laura. "Don't let James worry you about it."

That still, golden day even the hills seemed made of gold, and blue and gold and smooth emerald green were the only colours the eye noted out of all the spectroscope of colours. For two weeks now one rich warm day had succeeded another, and that day at Petit Port was the most beautiful of all. They took the picnic basket down to the edge of the motionless lake, and the driver unharnessed the horse and fastened him in the shade of the tree while he disposed himself for slumber in the empty carriage. The children were wild with delight, even the staid Horatia's voice was a shrill treble with excitement. They took off their shoes and stockings and tucked up their clothes as Laura said they might paddle. There were no bathing huts, so James held up the carriage robe while Lilla slipped out of her clothes and into her bathing dress. She looked a mere child in it, so young that Laura thought no one would have believed she had been seven years married and had borne a child and lost it.

They begged her to be careful of holes and uneven ground, and told her not to go in over her waist. She promised, but so great was her excitement that Laura wished she had bought a bathing suit and gone in too, the better to keep an eye on her. She made sparkling fountains of the blue water with her hands, and her head looked pure gold in the sunlight.

"If only I could swim!" she cried.

The children paddled cautiously, a little afraid of the stones. Olga sat reading "Robert Ellesmere," whose religious doubts she was beginning to find a trifle boring, and Laura and James lay on the grass at a little distance, watching Lilla and the children, and talking. James, she thought, was looking very frail again. There were dark shadows under his eyes, and his fine, austere profile looked almost transparent in that brilliant, searching light. His hands, too. Laura, placing her firm brown hand beside his, was ashamed of her own superior health and hold on life.

"James, Horace gives me more money now. He thinks it keeps me quiet. Won't you and Lilla take better rooms somewhere and let me pay for them? I do so wish you would."

"Thank you, my dear, but I'm afraid I can't do that. Horace's money is Horace's money, whether it comes through you or direct from him, and I can't accept it. Besides, I don't think we need bigger or better rooms. There'll never be a baby now, and we two can manage quite well as we are. More room would only mean more work for Lilla."

"I would gladly pay for a servant."

"We don't need a servant. A charwoman is quite sufficient two or three times a week." He suddenly called out, "Lilla! Please be careful, darling. It's deeper there. You frighten me when you go out so far."

Lilla waved to him and came in nearer to the shore.

"I'll be careful," she promised. "I believe I could almost swim. If I had just a little more confidence I'm sure I could."

"I'll teach you some day soon," Laura said. "Be patient."

"I need some more books," James went on. "If you could advance me the money to pay for them I'll pay you back when my new book of poems is published. But that's really all I want."

He was quieter of recent years, less apt to rail against the things he hated, to condemn the systems he knew were bad. He now tried to forget politics and politicians and gave up his mind entirely to poetry and literary criticism. Since he had married Lilla the happiness he found in her had had the effect of a gentle hand laid upon jangling strings.

"I know you worry about me," he said, meeting her eyes which had been resting on him with something of reproach in them, "but you needn't, Laura. I have only one fear, and that is the fear that I might die before Lilla, or that she might die before me. Life can't hurt me now in any other way. If it will only leave us together I shall ask no more of it. *Things* are useless to us. We have enough to eat, enough to wear, enough to read. I have the necessary materials for my work. Everything else is superfluous."

Laura twisted a tuft of grass in her fingers.

"I wish to God," she said, "that I were necessary to someone. Olga would miss me more than anyone, I think, if I were to die or drop out of my little circle. The children would get on without me; children always do, and it is right that they should. And Horace, of course. I need hardly have mentioned him. I've always longed to feel I was important to you, James, but I know I'm not. In fact you make me feel very unnecessary indeed."

He took her hand and gripped it.

"Don't say that, Laura, please, please. You ought to have had a better brother, a better father, a better husband. But you know that next to Lilla you mean more to me than anyone. I can't take part in life, actively. It's my health, I suppose. People to me are like trees walking. Only Lilla is more than that, and you. I love you, and I'm very grateful to you for loving me, but all love except Lilla's seems at times to encroach upon my privacy, my blessed and necessary aloneness, and I shrink from it. It gets in my way. Don't be hurt at what I'm saying, dearest Laura, it's my fault, not yours. I've got to *see* this world. This world that I was born into. I've got to *see* it. I've got to get it into my head somehow. I've got to understand it. It's what I'm here for. It's all I'm here for. Sometimes I'm so near to understanding it that my mind trembles on the very edge of reason, and I wonder whether I will go over or not. But," he struck his head with his fist, "I will understand it yet. I must. Only a poet ever can, and then only if he's sufficiently alone. Lilla doesn't get in my way. I knew she wouldn't, when I first saw her. I hear other things through her words; I can see through her lovely, transparent body to things beyond her. She's me and yet not-me. She's more me than not-me." He broke off, "Can you understand? Can you?"

"Yes, I understand now," she said, in a low voice, and there was a tightness in her throat. "If someone would say of me what you are saying of Lilla, I would die of happiness, I think."

He turned toward her and smiled and pressed her hand again.

"All men are not like Horace," he said, "and Laura, if you ever get a chance to be free of him, promise me that you will."

"But how can I? The children . . . I can't give them up. And I depend on him for everything, as he never grows tired of telling me."

"I know. But a chance may come some day. I hope that if it does you'll take it. Walk out, like Norah, in 'A Doll's House.'"

"If I had three hundred a year of my own . . . but I'd never leave the children."

"They won't be children for ever," James reminded her. "And when Horatia is of marriageable age, you'll still be young."

"Young?" exclaimed Laura. "I feel a middle-aged woman now."

As she spoke she turned her head to see if the children were getting into any mischief, or getting their clothes wet, and discovered that they were on dry land, inspecting a tiny fish they had caught in a bottle. Then she looked at Lilla and saw something that sent a wave of terror pouring over her. Lilla was much further out, beyond her depth, and she was struggling silently, in an effort to regain her feet. She was taking care not to cry out, but that she was in imminent danger Laura realized at once. James was lying on his back now, looking up at the sky. She stood up and began unfastening her skirt. If only he wouldn't suspect . . . if only she could get out there before he realized that anything was happening . . . those awful hooks, they caught, they wouldn't come undone. She slipped off her skirt, and stepping out of it, ran like a deer down to the water. Neither woman made any outcry. Lilla was lashing the water with her thin, childish arms, struggling, going under, gasping. Laura rushed into the lake till the water was up to her waist and then flung herself forward and struck out. At that moment Olga saw and heard, and sprang up with a little scream, dropping her book. James instantly raised his head, saw what was happening and leapt to his feet. Before Olga could intercept him he was running headlong down to the water—James, who never ran—crying;

"Lilla, I'm coming, my darling, I'm coming."

Laura turned her head and saw him and called out, "Go back, James! Go back! It's all right. Olga, don't let him . . ." but she dared not pause or look round after that for Lilla had gone under again. In four or five strokes she had reached the spot. She ducked, and grappled with a struggling body in blue serge, raised it, head down . . . it was minutes before she could get the head above water . . . and pushed her toward the shore. "Ten feet away is shallow water," she thought. "Shall I ever reach it?" Her legs were encumbered by the long white petticoat she wore, and her arms by Lilla's suddenly inert body. So entirely bent was she upon this difficult, life-and-death task, that she had no eyes for the shore or those upon it, and it was with surprise and infinite relief that she realized the nearness of the driver, a burly man who had waded out up to his chin to help her. She relinquished Lilla to him, and, weak from her exertions was barely in shallow water when she saw that James was lying stretched out upon the stones, at the very edge of the tiny, lapping waves, with Olga kneeling by him. Her wet petticoat clinging round her, she ran and fell on her knees beside him, crying, "James! Oh, James!" in the voice of one who knows with a dreadful certainty that those ears are for ever deaf to any voice. "James, dearest! Speak to me, speak to me!" She took his head in her hands, raised it gently, stared into his face, and lowered it again to its resting place on Olga's coat. Then everything went black and she fell in a heap beside him. She came to to find a group of people about her, and someone pouring fiery spirit down her throat. The children were standing at a little distance, crying, while a stout woman in black held a hand of each. She saw that they were carrying James to the carriage, and that the dripping driver was hastily backing the horse into its shafts. Another carriage had driven up, and it was the occupants of this—two middle-aged men and two women in mourning—who were doing what they could to help. Laura got to her feet and went to Lilla, who was lying wrapped in a carriage rug. One of the middle-aged Frenchmen, with Olga's assistance, had been working her arms and applying first aid, and she was now conscious. She opened her eyes as Laura bent over her and presently spoke. "I have killed my darling." Laura, the tears running down her cheeks, tried to comfort her. They carried her to the second carriage, the children following. A doctor was spoken of, another suggested, and then another. "The best, the nearest," cried Laura. "But hurry, hurry!" and the terrible little procession made its way under the tunnels of green trees toward the town, the sunlight slanting through and falling on the face of James, austere and beautiful, and on the pale, childish face of Lilla, whose golden hair was spread about her shoulders, like a drowned Ophelia. She knew, she knew somehow, even before they brought her to, and now she was lying with her head against the back of the carriage, trying hard to die, determined that the faint, exhausted life in her should grow no stronger, but should retreat farther and farther, and free itself at last and slip away out of her body to join that dear one who was waiting. Her eyes were shut fast, she scarcely breathed. There was not much time. She knew they were taking her to the doctor's, and before he could do his worst or best with her she must be beyond his help. With all the will there was left in her she was escaping from the blank intolerableness of life without the one who was all life to her. The jolting of the carriage conveyed no sensation to her brain, nor the snapping of the driver's whip. She was drifting backwards down a long black tunnel toward the light. Outside were space and light and freedom, and her beloved. She moved toward them by a gentle letting go. It was lovelier than swimming, lovelier even than her dreams of flying. Letting go, letting go. Drifting backwards with the most exquisite, gentle motion. Drifting, floating, sinking, it was all those things. Lovely. They couldn't catch her now.

When they carried her into the house, she felt nothing. When Laura cried, "Do you think you can save her?" a tiny smile moved the corners of her mouth. She was saving herself.

Horace, in reply to Laura's despairing telegram, left his shooting in Scotland and came to Aix, arriving in time to help the two women with some of the more dreadful details. He was shocked and very much subdued, spoke only in low tones, and seemed much moved. He had never liked James, for he knew James didn't like him, and not to be liked was, to Horace, equivalent to being assaulted and robbed, but he was fond of Lilla, and the cutting off of those two young lives depressed him deeply for a while. He was kind to Laura and didn't tell her what it was all going to cost him more than twice, but without Olga she felt she would have gone out of her mind with grief and misery. When it was all over, and an English parson had tortured her with glib, well-meaning but shop-worn phrases, she turned to Horace and cried, "Take us back to England. Quickly, quickly! This place is haunted for me now."

The little party returned in the first week of October, and Laura, Olga and the children went at once to Pennyfields. Horace returned to Scotland, but gave Laura to understand that he was not going for pleasure, but for reasons of health, as he felt low both in body and in spirit. She was grateful to him for what he had done, but there was nothing she wanted less in those early days of her grief than to have him with her. She went up to London soon after her return and spent the day with Rosa in Stratford Place. Her father she simply couldn't and wouldn't see, and she preferred, for the present, not to see Violet. Rosa spent the day weeping, but she wept for a prodigal.

"He will know now," she sobbed, "he will know now how wrong and foolish he was. He will meet his Creator face to face. If only it hadn't been for that dreadful, dreadful old man, we might all have been so happy together."

She still blamed Mr. John. Laura marvelled that one could give birth to a child and understand it so little. The mental processes of an axolotyl could not have been more foreign and unknown to Rosa than those of her son. Laura did not see Harry for months, and when she did no mention was made of James. She studied her father as if he had been a stranger. What was he, that queer, thin, ageing, harassed-looking, uneasy, pompous creature? Was he really anything to her? Was it possible that he was responsible for her very existence? It seemed so essentially unlikely and untrue that the thought of it gave her a feeling of repulsion, repugnance. Still, it was a fact, and his hands were as like hers as it was possible for hands belonging to people of different sexes to be. It seemed to her that it was all she had got from him; a long, straight thumb, a square palm, and straight, inflexible fingers. He kept looking at her oddly that day, as though he were turning over in his mind something he wanted to say to her, without quite knowing how to put it, and when she left the old house in Kensington Square she went away with the impression that her father wanted something from her, and wanted it very badly, but that it had nothing to do with the affections.

James's poems were collected and published in uniform bindings. Laura had a great deal of work to do in connection with this, and for the first time in her life she felt that she was really doing something for James, really helping him at last. She met his publishers, two brothers long prominent in the literary world, courteous and charming men whose praise of James's work made her almost happy until she was swept by a wave of longing for him to be there to hear it. The elder brother, Mr. William Abinger, asked her to lunch with him, and they talked of nothing but James. They lunched at the Victoria Hotel in Northumberland Avenue, and for the first time in her life Laura sat at table in a public restaurant, alone with a man who was not a relation.

"You must write your brother's life some day," Mr. Abinger said, and saw the tears flood his companion's eyes.

"It was so short, it was so short! And so repressed, and so crippled by lack of sympathy and understanding. In his thoughts, James was fifty years ahead of his time. Oh, Mr. Abinger, the cruelty, the awful cruelty of the stupid!"

He nodded. "The cruelty of the stupid." That cry from the heart echoed in his ears for a long time. "But his married life," he said. "That is one of the most lovely and interesting stories I have ever listened to."

"Yes. Some day I'll write it. But I must have more experience, I must live more, I must talk to more people, I must read much, much more before I attempt it. I must get things into focus. Now they're too near, and too sad."

"But make notes," he urged her, "while your youth and his and all the incidents that went to make up his early life are still fresh in your mind. And whenever you need help, or advice, let me know."

"I will," she said, "I will."

He asked Laura to lunch again to meet some writers, and one or two other members of the firm. She liked them, and they liked her. She asked both William and Edward Abinger to Pennyfields for the week-end the following spring, and Sir George Humphries as well. He had grown stouter, and had a troublesome bronchial cough, but he was as entertaining and delightful as ever. Laura and Olga were enchanted at the success of their little party. It had been so pleasant not having any other women. They didn't know any woman who wouldn't have been a slightly jarring element, and though the neighbours would probably talk if they heard of it, they made up their minds that they didn't care. Laura had further discussed the question of James's Life. She warned Mr. Abinger that she couldn't possibly publish it while her parents lived—or at any rate, her mother. For her father's feelings she cared very little. But he still urged her to begin. Later they could talk about publication. To write while her memories were fresh was of the greatest importance.

"Your brother's name," he said, "will become better known, year by year. Already it is spoken of with such names as Dobell, Patmore, James Thomson, Davidson, the Rossettis. His fame will grow."

So Laura began to make notes and to write down, as they happened to come to her, her recollections of James's youth. One day Cedric Jackson came to see her. He had been "taken up" by a rich, pious, elderly North Country woman, and lived in her house, very rarely coming to London, and more rarely still, it seemed to Laura, putting pen to paper. His rich patroness was doing her best to ruin him as a poet, and although he appeared to realize it he was too weak-willed and too grateful to her to resist. Since Laura had last seen him he had gone over to the Roman Catholic Church and had returned again to the Church of England (adhering, she gathered, to the more elaborate, rich and ornate forms of worship to be found within that body). With the delicate and beautiful refinement of a Giotto Virgin, he sat palely in Laura's drawing-room and talked about James. She told him that James had left an estate of £43.17.6, twenty pounds of which was paid in by his publishers on the day of his death for royalties accruing from his last book of verse.

"And was that all?" he asked, and when Laura said it was, he shook his head. But she assured him that James had never actually suffered from poverty. He had dared to marry, and had succeeded in supporting his wife and himself without help.

"I think," he said, "that what one remembers most about James is his integrity. His absolute integrity. I have never in my life known anything like it. I have tried to imitate it, but I know I have failed, and failed badly."

"He was true to himself always, always," Laura said. "He never made compromises. James was all spirit, all will."

"And yet," said Cedric, looking down at his long, slender hands, "he didn't *believe*. And I who do—"

"Believe?" asked Laura, sharply, irritated. "Believe what? James believed a great many things. He believed in the value of the good life. He believed that beauty and truth were of the utmost importance to mankind, and the search for them. He believed that wars are vile and terrible. He believed that man, who came from the ape, has a great destiny. He believed that organized religions have a tendency to warp and dwarf the minds of men, although he believed that the religious spirit, the aspiring spirit that is in man, is undying and unconquerable. What do you mean when you say he didn't believe?"

The man who had spent the last six years of his life hovering between two churches, looked wonderingly at her. He suddenly saw in her, for the first time, a resemblance to her brother.

CHAPTER X

THE Eighteen Nineties came, with their revival of interest in literature and painting, their coterie of brilliant young men, their rather charming and superficial decadence and their good critics. They found Laura still living in the house in Stratford Place, still living under the same roof with but apart from Horace, still spending much of her time with Olga at Pennyfields—(there was no shooting there, and Olga did not keep horses, and, as there was nothing for him to do, they were rarely troubled with Horace's company)—and still trying to persuade herself that she had no more reason to be unhappy than most people had. She recovered very slowly from James's death. That double tragedy persistently haunted her, and she was stalked, chiefly at night, by an illogical sense of responsibility. The cheque she had sent them to enable them to make the journey often waved and fluttered before her eyes. But she was outgrowing that. During the first year of his death she went to several séances, and a voice spoke to her that claimed to be James's voice, but the sentiments he uttered were the sentiments he would rather have died than utter, and she went away depressed and dispirited.

Stubbs had made no prophecies since the death of the Emperor William in March 1888, which had been followed, in June, by the death of his son, the Emperor Frederick, exactly as she had predicted. Or, if she did look into the future by means of the leaves in her teacup, she told no one of her discoveries. She refused any longer to accommodate Olga and Laura when they went to her for that purpose, and whether or not she had foreseen the deaths of James and Lilla, Laura was never able to ascertain, so close-lipped had Stubbs become. Only to amuse the servants would she sometimes warn them of faithless friends, dark lovers, and the conventional surprise coming through the post.

At the beginning of 1892 Horace, who had been making enormous donations to charities, received a Knighthood. He consulted Laura, before the event, as to whether or not he should accept it, if offered, and as she knew his doubts were quite insincere (he had long ago made up his mind to be Sir Horace), and as she was completely indifferent herself, she told him to do whatever he thought fit. Their friends were therefore gratified to read in the *Times* on the morning of January 2nd the following notice:

"Among the tokens of Royal favour bestowed this New Year on distinguished citizens, Her Majesty has been pleased to elevate Horace Walter Leighton, Esq., head of the important firm of armament manufacturers, Leighton and Armytage, to the rank and dignity of a Knight. Sir Horace was born in London in 1844 and is the only son of the late John Fowler Leighton Esq. The importance of such men as Sir Horace to the country and the Empire cannot be overestimated, and it is to persons of his foresight, ability and acumen that Great Britain owes much of her prosperity and power," etc., etc.

"Which I daresay is quite true," Laura said to Olga. "And I suppose that a young woman of thirty—are women to be considered still young at thirty?—ought to be pleased and gratified at the idea of being called 'Your ladyship.' Moreover, there's very little doubt in my mind that in a few years Horace will be made a peer. But, oh, Olga, if I could be decently quit of him for ever how glad I would be!"

"Well, you can't, my dear," Olga replied, "so it's no good thinking of it. A wife is a very convenient screen for him. If he were free, every ambitious female in England and not a few imported ones would be scrambling for him and he knows it. Besides, you make him so comfortable. Do you think he ever sees Kitty Olleridge these days?"

"I don't think so. That affair has burnt itself out. It's young Mrs. Westchurch now, I'm almost sure. Anyway, he is constantly asking me to have her at the house. I really don't mind very much, for at least she isn't common and fast like Kitty Olleridge, and moreover I think she's seriously in love with Horace, poor thing. She never takes her great eyes off him. And her husband being in India, of course, makes matters much easier for them."

"What a fool she is," Olga observed. "She doesn't want a divorce. I believe she and her husband get on very well when he's home, and she has three nice children. It's sure to lead to unhappiness for her."

"It's very flattering to one's vanity, I suppose, to have someone like Horace in love with you. You know I was as pleased as Punch when Colin Murrey fell in love with me. I'm like an icicle unless I happen to be in love myself, but still I was exceedingly grateful to Mr. Murrey. He restored my faith in myself, and after the treatment I've received from Horace I was badly in need of it, heaven knows!"

"I wonder you sent him away then."

"Yes, but Olga, I have a conscience, you know, and it makes me miserable to cause even a foolish young man suffering. If it weren't for that I would allow my vanity to be soothed that way a good deal oftener."

"Well, I must say I often wish one could have men friends without being talked about," said Olga.

"You used to be so daring," Laura reminded her.

"I know. But it's pride, partly. I can't bear people to think I've forgotten Arthur."

"Arthur was such a darling. He'd understand. He wouldn't mind, I'm sure."

"I thought you didn't believe people went on living after death."

"I'm not sure I do, but you do, and that's why I spoke like that."

"I know Arthur doesn't want me to be unhappy," said Olga, "but if I did put anyone in his place it would have to be someone worthy of him."

"It's hard for us to have to live like nuns," Laura said. "You only twenty-nine, and me only thirty. And you're handsomer than ever, and I don't think I've changed much, do you? I don't weigh an ounce more than I did when I was married."

"You haven't changed at all. And clothes nowadays are so youthful and becoming. I declare, from the back you can't tell a young girl from a middle-aged woman. These sailor hats and trim skirts and big sleeves are much more youthful than the things we wore ten years ago. I remember a skirt I had—I believe I wore it on the moors, in Scotland—that had eleven flounces on it, all of different widths and trimmed with braid. I can't think how we moved."

"Well, what are we going to do with all this youthfulness?" Laura asked. "What's the good of our wearing trim skirts, and showing our ankles, and wearing fringes?"

The two women were sitting over a log fire at Pennyfields. It was a cold, wet January, and Laura had brought the children down soon after Christmas—which they had spent at Stratford Place—with the governess, Miss Wellcome, a bright young woman with pleasing features who had little in common with Miss Mossbanks, but was alert, progressive, and something (but not too much) of the New Woman. She did her hair severely, wore plaid blouses and thick boots, and treated men as equals. It would be quite impossible, Laura sometimes said, to put Miss Wellcome in an embarrassing position, for nothing on earth could upset her poise. Under her tuition Horatia was making progress. She could now speak French quite grammatically and could draw and colour maps with considerable skill.

"We do it to please ourselves, I suppose," said Olga, in answer to Laura's question.

"Do monarchs set fashions in morals," Laura wondered, "or follow them? Under the free and easy Georges we were free and easy, under virtuous Victoria we take more care of our reputations than of our complexions, and our first thoughts are for our homes. Where do you suppose these waves start from? From the people, or from their rulers? Would you and I live gaily and perhaps in sin if George the First were on the throne, or are our prejudices really part of ourselves? It puzzles me very much. I'm almost certain that if enough charming and frivolous people set me a charming and frivolous example, I'd follow it."

"I don't think I ever thought about that," said Olga.

"I suppose I'd find it hard to begin now," Laura continued, "because I'd have to combat so many long-established ideas, and habits of thought, within myself, I mean. I like my life to be orderly. I'd hate to get into a mess, a moral mess particularly. Think of poor Parnell and Kitty

O'Shea. I wouldn't entangle myself like that for any man. I'd worry and agonize myself to death."

"I suppose we're both afraid of life," Olga said, "unless we can bring it to heel like a nice dog."

"Yes, to have one's name in the papers, to realize that people were whispering about one—I simply couldn't endure it. I couldn't look my children in the face. And although I'm miserable with Horace, I know I could never, never have a lover."

"But why," asked Olga, "should *you* have any sense of sin? You're not religious."

"I know. It's just a feeling that exists between me and myself, if you know what I mean."

"Yes. I think I do. But it's different with me. I *know* I shall be punished if I do anything wrong. I expect to be punished for all my bad behaviour as a young girl, although that was youthful high spirits and ignorance, really. I believe that whatever we do here affects our conditions in the next life, so why make it unpleasant for ourselves?"

"Yes, that's quite sensible and logical if you think like that, but I don't. I almost wish I did. It's fairly easy to say no to caviar if you know it will make you ill, but if you're not at all convinced there will be any unpleasant results it's not so easy."

Laura, who sat nearest to the fire, was shielding her face with a painted fan. Her brown hair was done in a great coil at the back of her neck and her fringe was crisply curled and neatly arranged upon her broad forehead. The faces of these two pretty women were innocent of cosmetics. Laura, when her nose was shiny, used a chamois cloth which was understood to remove the shine, while Olga, more daring in such ways, used a very little powdered orris root and chalk. Olga had completely given up her wild, reckless habits. She still smoked, but never in public now, and she no longer drank. Drink brought her headaches but no solace, and she was too sensible to persist. But cigarettes she still clung to, and Laura occasionally smoked one, when they were alone together, with an agreeable sense of guilt.

"Do you know," she asked, a few minutes later, "what Horace said to me the other day? He said he doubted very much if any woman who came to her husband penniless, as I did, ever received more generous treatment than I've received. Olga, I'd give anything if somehow or other I could acquire a big enough sum of money to pay him back every penny he's ever spent on me."

"I can imagine how you feel. But I don't see what good that would do. You'd still be tied to him."

"He wouldn't be able to fling that reproach at me again, at any rate. It was the one thing in his whole life that papa has ever chanced to be right about."

"Stop thinking about Horace and about your father. They're unpleasant subjects and make you morbid. We'll go to Venice in May, if you like, so think about that instead. You can easily leave the children with Miss Wellcome. We could take Sir George with us if he's well enough, and the elections are over by then. He's almost as old as Gladstone himself, so I should think it would be quite proper."

"Olga, darling, I'd die without you!"

"No, you wouldn't. You've got Richard and Horatia, you fortunate wretch."

"Yes, I'm thankful, heaven knows. Those boring elections. I'd forgotten about them. I suppose it will be Gladstone again. Haven't we any younger men? I really think that at eighty-two the poor old thing ought to be allowed to retire."

"I don't suppose he wants to retire."

"I don't suppose he does. He has hopes of being able to pass the Home Rule Bill before he goes. I wish he could, and then we'd hear the end of it. Ireland and Egypt! How dull politics are! I care nothing for Women's Rights, but it seems to me that women might make things a little more amusing than they are now. One gets so tired of the same thing every day. Just now, of course, it's chiefly Egypt. Cromer, Milner, Rosebery, the Khedive, Kitchener; it's the same names repeated *ad nauseam*. Which reminds me. You know what a craze Horatia has for Kitchener, and how she has a coloured picture of him in uniform in her room? Well, at bedtime one day, before we left London, Miss Wellcome caught her saying her prayers to him! Aren't you amused? I was. He really does look rather god-like with those splendid moustaches and that admirable figure."

Olga laughed, and then asked, "What did you say to her?"

"I didn't say very much. I told her not to be silly, and I confessed to her that I had felt very much the same once about the Prince Imperial. I didn't tell her that I was really in love with him, but of course I was."

"She's the hero-worshipping type, I expect," Olga said.

"Most of us are in England. It's very stupid. I even find myself admiring Horace because he's so successful." She broke off. "But I'm not going to talk about Horace. Would you like to come with me to the Albert Hall on the eighteenth to hear that new Mass? It's by a woman, a Miss Smyth."

"Yes, I'd love to. I'll come and stay for a day or two if you can have me. I want to order a new costume, and do some shopping. I never thought there'd be a woman composer, did you?"

"I don't see why there shouldn't be. The morning papers were unkind enough to remark that she'd never have got it produced at the Albert Hall at all except that she happens to be friendly with Royalty, and said that ladies must not rejoice prematurely. They do keep us in our place, don't they? We'll go to Ibsen's play, too, 'The Master Builder.' James loved Ibsen, and so do I."

"How Aunt Susan would have hated our going! I remember she wrote a furious letter to the *Times* when 'A Doll's House' was first produced. She said it was immoral and wicked, and that she would rather see a daughter of hers dead at her feet than allow her mind to be poisoned by such filth."

"Poor Aunt Susan! Do you think Uncle Robert misses her very much?"

"Not as much as she thought he would. Uncle Robert is a born Club man. I think he's really much happier in some ways."

England was enjoying an era of peace—(only slightly disturbed by Dr. Jameson and the Matabeles, and political crises in Egypt and Ireland)—and prosperity. She was expanding in every direction, her markets had never been more active, the future had never seemed brighter. It was a decade famous for its pretty society women, and pretty actresses, its long and successful theatrical runs, and its flattering gallants. Women bicycled, they learnt golf, they played tennis, but all these things they did coquettishly and with both eyes on the admiring male. Stories and novels invariably ended, "And so they were married"; blind cupid appeared in all the most popular Academy pictures, and playwrights skimmed lightly (and Oscar Wilde wittily), over the thin surface of life. Royal weddings occupied the attention of everyone, from my lady to the farmer's wife, who devoutly pinned pictures of the latest royal wedded pair on her cottage wall. Professor Dewar lectured on liquid air ("Fancy, liquid air, my dear! What won't they discover next?") Selous returned from the wilds and talked of big game, De Lesseps was tried in Paris, germs began to play an important rôle in people's thoughts, Ulster repudiated the Home Rule Bill with unpleasant demonstrations, the Queen journeyed to Italy in the company of her son and grandson (who watched her painting water-colours on the terrace at Maiano), and America, in spite of a recent panic of a serious nature, prepared for the Great International Exhibition in Chicago.

Stubbs's brother Edward was going. He was taking a holiday, he wrote, and what better use could one make of a holiday than by spending it at an Exhibition where one could be learning something all the time? He was now a highly paid official of the Union Pacific Railway at a salary that enabled him to live comfortably in a six room house in Oakland, keep a Chinese servant and a horse and buggy to take him to and from his work. He implored his sister to come and visit him. He offered to meet her in Chicago, show her the Exhibition, and take her back with him to California. He sent her money for the journey, and Laura procured her a berth in the second cabin on the good ship Umbria. But at the last minute her courage failed her and she changed her mind. "Go all that way alone, I simply cannot. When you can go with me, I'll go, but not before." "But my dear Stubbs," Laura replied, a little exasperated, "it's unlikely that I shall ever go to America at all. I do think you're foolish, really. And your brother will be bitterly disappointed." "Then disappointed he must be," was Stubbs's reply, and there the matter ended.

In 1894, Richard, then nearly ten, was sent away to boarding-school at Margate. In some ways Laura dreaded the thought of school for him, with its treadmill life, its little brutalities, and its terrible power of levelling down, but she realized that although so far he was perfectly unspoiled and delightful, she and Olga were probably bad for him, and she let him go resignedly. Horatia now went daily to the Graham Street school, on the borders of Chelsea, but Miss Wellcome remained to take her to and from the school and continue her French lessons, for she spoke French correctly and with not at all a bad accent. Horatia inherited little from Laura beyond a hatred of damp winter weather, and a tendency to bad colds and chilblains, which latter Laura had at last outgrown. She was a determined child, with unexpected powers of concentration, and was doggedly devoted to her mother. The children were proud of their father and although they saw little of him, he was to them a kind of tamed and domesticated god. Laura wondered how long it would be before they realized how unlike most other husbands and fathers he was, and when they would begin to see his faults. She was in no hurry for that, for she knew they would begin to see faults in her also, and that when critical powers are once developed they spare no one.

Horace had gone from Kitty Olleridge to Mrs. Westchurch, and from Mrs. Westchurch to an American divorcée, a beautiful woman named Mrs. Emerson, who made, in that year of grace, a considerable stir in London society. A divorced American woman was received—though not, of course, by Royalty—while a divorced English woman was regarded with suspicion. But besides her undeniable beauty, Mrs. Emerson's wealth had an appeal of its own, and sang with a siren voice a song to which the majority of ears were beginning to be attuned. With her married sister, Mrs. Spellman, she took a house in Grosvenor Square and entertained on the grand scale. Laura met her, and behind a pair of resolute, hard and ambitious eyes she discovered an enemy. Kitty Olleridge and Mrs. Westchurch had preferred to remain on friendly terms with her, but not so Mrs. Emerson, who asked Horace alone to her parties—and alone Horace went.

"Wouldn't you rather we were divorced, Horace?" Laura asked him one day. "I'll give you cause if you like, for I only have to be unfaithful while you would have to be cruel as well. If you'll agree to let me keep the children and make me a fair allowance, I'll do whatever is necessary, for really, I've very little pride left. Mrs. Emerson would give her eyes to marry you, and hates me for being in her way."

"I don't approve of divorce," replied Horace.

"But Mrs. Emerson . . ."

"That is her own affair, and has nothing to do with me. She was divorced in her own country, where the laws are different."

They were at breakfast when this conversation took place, almost the only time Laura could see her husband alone.

"But, Horace, suppose I were to fall in love with someone? It will be surprising if I don't, before I'm forty."

"That's your affair, my dear. I hope you won't, naturally. You have everything you want, a charming home, friends, servants, your children, your mother and sister are always welcome here, your bills are always paid, you go and come when you like. Surely you have very little to complain of."

Laura, resting her chin on her hands, turned her head and looked him squarely in the eyes. "Do you really mean that, or are your powers of self-deception infinite?"

"I mean it, certainly."

"Then God help you!"

"Have you women nothing to think about but marrying, and getting unmarried? You seem to have divorce on the brain nowadays. You have nothing to complain of, so you invent causes of complaint. You were determined to find fault with me from the very first!"

"Horace! What a frightful distortion of the truth! It's almost funny. Never mind, we won't discuss that. Then I am to understand that you don't want to marry Mrs. Emerson?"

"I happen to be already married."

Laura pushed back her chair and got up. "How I wish one could talk to you!" she exclaimed. She walked up and down the room, her hands on her hips. She was conscious that he was watching her, and it crossed her mind that had she been someone else's wife she might have attracted Horace very much. "But you won't talk. You will never say what you mean, what you really feel. That's your strength, I believe, the secret of your success, never to disclose your feelings. I don't know how you can live without expressing yourself, without sometimes telling the truth about yourself. But perhaps you do to other people. You live a perfectly dual life. You think one thing and do another. I believe you congratulate yourself on being a faithful husband even when you're in another woman's bed." She was near the door when she said this and she turned abruptly and went out before Horace could reply. For several days he wore a gravely injured look when he was with her, and was with her no more than he could help. More than ever now he played the part of a husband with a grievance.

A week or so later, Harry called to see her. He came one fine, warm afternoon, when Laura, in better spirits than for some time past, was about to go to Pennyfields to stay with Olga.

He sat in her drawing-room, wearing a look of forced and unnatural cheerfulness, as though he was at the bedside of a sick person. That sick person, she soon discovered, was himself. After some delay he came to the point.

"I've said nothing to your mamma or Violet, but the truth is I'm in a little temporary difficulty. Nothing that can't quite easily be put right. The fact is that I'm a little short of cash."

"Papa! Don't tell me you've been betting heavily."

"An occasional small bet on the races, perhaps once a week, is all I allow myself, and I get very good tips. No, it isn't that. Do you remember my old friend Arthur Sutcliffe?"

"Yes, Lord Doxendale. I had an idea he was dead."

"Very much alive, on the contrary. He's in the City, now, and director of several important companies. He came to me the other day and persuaded me to put some money into Kaffirs—to buy on the margin, in fact, in anticipation of a quick rise. I took his advice, and—well, they dropped, and I was caught." He broke off, and coughed. "It's very unfortunate. They went up again shortly after, but it was too late, then. I was—"

"Not ruined?"

"Well, very much inconvenienced. I haven't told your mamma, or Violet."

"But how much—inconvenienced? You'll be obliged to sell the house?"

"It's already in the hands of agents. But that won't cover—that will only partly—"

Laura saw that his hands were trembling.

"Papa, this is dreadful. What possessed you to gamble like that? I don't suppose it's the first time. I've thought for some months you had something on your mind."

"I sold some of my shares not long ago. I meant to buy Consols, but I bought Deep Levels at Arthur's advice, and made a good profit. I invested what I made then in Industrials, but the American panic affected them and I was advised to sell at a loss. I thought I'd try something bigger, and Arthur talked me into buying Kaffirs. I haven't told your mamma, or Violet."

"So you said. I'm sorry this has happened. I suppose I'd better speak to Horace about it."

"If you would. I know he's a rich man, very rich. And I've never asked any favours of him. I dare say he could lend me a couple of thousand and not feel it."

"I didn't mean that. I meant I would ask his advice. I wouldn't think of asking him to lend—"

"Isn't he your husband? And isn't he my son-in-law?"

"Remember you said once that you would never call him that."

"I let him marry you. I withdrew my opposition. And it isn't as if I'd asked him for anything before. I've said nothing to your mamma about it, or Violet. Violet is very extravagant. She ought to marry. I don't know why she doesn't marry. But speak to Horace. Tell him I'm only temporarily inconvenienced. There are plenty of ways of getting money presently."

"I cannot ask Horace for money," said Laura, "or even suggest it, but I'll ask him to see you."

"I mustn't waste time. I'm hard pressed. Horace could perfectly well have made me a director of his company if he'd wanted to. He ought to have done it."

"You seem to have forgotten that you called him a tradesman and objected to him because he was in business."

"Times have changed. Times have changed."

"Never mind. I'm very sorry you have been so foolish. I'll do anything I can for mamma and Violet, of course."

"It wasn't foolish. Fortunes are made that way. I might have been a rich man now, and then no one would have complained."

"No one wanted you to be a rich man. And why should you want to be, at your age? You were comfortable and happy."

"I see you're determined to look at things in the wrong light. I was badly advised. But don't say anything to your mamma, or Violet."

"You must tell them at once, papa. I'll speak to Horace tonight and ask him to make an appointment with you. That is all I can do."

"He's a very rich man. He could easily lend me two thousand—"

She saw him to the front door and was thankful that he did not offer to kiss her. When she went up to her room she rang for Stubbs, and as soon as she came, burst into tears and cried on the faithful woman's shoulder.

It was as she feared. Horace had not only to help her father with advice, but to help him financially. And she heard of it.

"Well, my dear," he said with a forced smile, "I hardly expected to have to keep your father and his family. Especially after the things he said to me before I married you. I hope you realize what I am doing."

"Perfectly," she replied, "and I hope you realize how I feel about it. I hate taking money from you myself, so you can imagine how much I dislike their taking it."

And she sought refuge at Pennyfields with Olga.

The house in Kensington Square was sold and the three moved to a small flat in Victoria Street, where Violet had a bed-sitting room with a phonograph in it and a great many framed photographs of young men. She was once more in correspondence with Mr. Blakeney, and had almost made up her mind to marry him (she was thirty-one) when, while staying with a friend at Hove she met a solicitor named John Lewis Sprigge. ("Not a Sprigge of the aristocracy, I'm afraid," remarked Olga, after meeting him.) He was nearing forty, growing bald, and was much given to bicycling to keep his weight down. His firm was Acton, Sprigge and Son, of which he was the son. It was a good firm and made money, and Lewis belonged to two London clubs and a bicycling club which included among its members a prominent barrister, two actors, and a well-known novelist—all of which gave Violet confidence. He rode a Columbia bicycle, painted a bright green, and gave one of the same make, but painted pale blue, to Violet, as an engagement present. They rode in Battersea Park.

"If you'd come a little earlier," Harry told him gloomily, "you'd have got the girl with a settlement. As it is I can only give you my blessing and perhaps fifty pounds a year when my affairs are put straight again."

Mr. Sprigge seemed to think he had done well to get Violet with nothing.

"Can't think how you weren't snapped up years ago," he said, pinching her cheek. Violet replied that she was waiting for Mr. Right. And now that she had got him she was as sparing of her embraces as she had once been prodigal. They were married at St. Peter's, Eaton Square, and took a flat in Cromwell Road, which Laura helped to furnish. Olga gave Violet her wedding dress and her flat silver, which came from Mappin and Webb's.

The following winter Harry had a bad attack of jaundice, followed by gall stones. An operation was found to be necessary and from this he failed to recover. He lingered for a day or two and died in the presence of Rosa, his old friend the voiceless Mr. Dowdie, and the vicar of St. Mary Abbot's, whom Rosa summoned to his bedside at his request. Laura was unable to feel any grief at her father's death, though she was sorry for Rosa, who had lost a companion of so many years. He was sixty-six when he died, and Rosa only fifty-four. When his affairs were finally settled it was found that Rosa would have something less than two hundred pounds a year. With help from her daughters she could manage very comfortably at Hove, where pleasant rooms were found for her in a desirable square.

Not long after Harry's death, Laura received a call from Lord Doxendale. He told Laura how sorry he was to have been the indirect cause of her father's misfortunes.

"I told him . . . not to buy Kaffirs," he said. "And Harry said to me, 'If you say don't buy, by Gad I will buy, because every . . . tip you've given me has been wrong up to now.' So he bought, and I was right. Poor old Harry's judgment never was . . . too good. For the last year or two I wondered if his mind wasn't failing. You don't think so? Well, you may be . . . right. He was a gay young feller in the old days. Dear me! Mott's, the Argyll, we used to go to them all."

"You miss those old days, I expect." She was thinking, "So that's how papa came to buy those shares!"

"Miss them? By Gad, yes. Men and women were men and women then. And the stage was the stage, too. You never saw . . . Vance, I suppose, Alfred Vance? No, you ain't old enough. Gad, there's no one like that . . . now.

Alfred Vance. I'd give my eyes to hear him sing a song now. Leybourne, too."

"What did he use to sing?"

"Sing? Why, 'Champagne Charlie is my name.' That's what made him famous. I could sing it now. And 'Slap, Bang!' How did it go?" He suddenly began to sing, in a thin, high voice, waving a gold-headed cane;

"Slap bang, here we are again;
Slap bang, here we are again—and
We always are so jolly, so jolly,
Yes, we always are so jolly,
As jolly as can be.'

"Gad! They don't write songs like that now. Harry used to love that song. 'We always are so jolly, so jolly.' I remember one night we went to a hangin'—"

"Did my father ever go to a hanging?" Laura asked. "I never knew that."

"By Gad, yes. We all went. All the young . . . bloods. I remember the last one we went to, the last one there ever was. I remember Harry singin' that . . . song. That was a time!"

"He liked going? You all liked it?"

"Liked it? Of course. All the young fellers went."

Laura shuddered and thought, "He turned James out of the house for going to see his old tutor." She was thankful to be rid of the raffish old man, with his black and white checked suit with its tightly buttoned coat, his bright waistcoat and white spats. His face was as wrinkled as an old ape's, and his small rheumy eyes were still the eyes of a gay old dog to whom a pretty woman's ankle was still a thing to be peered at and craned after, and to whom all human love could be expressed in terms of a wink.

The year 1896 saw a great, fashionable Anglo-American wedding, when Miss Consuelo Vanderbilt was married to the Duke of Marlborough at St. Thomas's, New York. The great British public was shocked at and quickly forgot the Armenian massacres, the German Emperor visited the English Lakes, Lord Salisbury was Prime Minister, and the Ashanti Expedition set out for the Gold Coast for the purpose of persuading Prempeh to admit a British Resident at Kumasi. Tree and Dorothy Baird played "Trilby" to delighted thousands, "The Geisha" made its sparkling début, and "The Gay Parisienne" with its high-kicking ladies in large hats set everyone singing;

"Always give advice to other people what to do,
But say to other people when they give advice to you,
Tootle, tootle, tootle, tootle, tootle, tootle, tootle, too."

The Empire was spreading, spreading; young men thrilled to the sound of barbaric names, great spectacles, at Olympia, at the Crystal Palace, and Kiralfy's at Earl's Court, of natives in native costumes doing (modified) native dances, roused national pride in far-away colonies, and young ladies shivered happily at the sight of uniforms. It was a time of hero-worship, of uncritical and enthusiastic Imperialism, of courage and sacrifice so common as to be taken for granted. Meanwhile Trades Unionism grew and gained strength and dreamed of power, and the great, unchanging drama of the poor, lay, as ever, in the rise and fall of the price of bread. America was a fabulous country which sent over heiresses and Columbia bicycles, fancied itself as civilized as England, and had invented a thing called a Manhattan cocktail (whatever that might be).

And it was in the autumn of the year 1896 that Laura fell in love.

CHAPTER XI

She used to dine with the Edward Abingers from time to time when Horace was dining elsewhere—presumably at Mrs. Emerson's. At first he would pretend they were business dinners he went to, or City banquets, but he presently ceased to offer any explanation at all, and would kiss her cheek and depart after asking, in the most perfunctory manner, if there were anything he could do for her. Sometimes when she knew in advance that he was going out she would send a note to Esther Abinger to ask if she might come and dine, it being an understood thing that she was to do this.

It was there one evening that she met Arnold Sendler. Their first encounter was not altogether propitious. She thought him decidedly "interesting looking," with a pair of quick, responsive eyes, a high, broad, well-modelled forehead, and features that reminded her of Goethe's in pictures she had seen. (Though this last only occurred to her when the evening was over and she was home in bed.) A face unadorned by beard or moustache was rare among her acquaintances, and she looked at this one with approval. But his slight German accent was less pleasing to her, she and Olga having decided, on somewhat flimsy grounds, that though they admired German genius they didn't care for Germans. If he gave signs of being somewhat nervous, he was nevertheless most emphatic in his opinions, and what he said, he said with a confidence that she thought slightly overdone. Once he corrected her, with perfect politeness, when she made a misstatement about an item of news in the morning paper. She thought this unnecessary, as the matter was not important, said very little more to him, and for the rest of the evening took a faintly malicious pleasure in ignoring him. She was looking very well; a recent gain of a few pounds in weight suited her, and her nerves, being better covered, were less apt to rasp and trouble her than for some time past. Her colouring was generally high at night, and the contrast between the warm tones of her skin and her blue eyes was then very noticeable. She was fond of dressing in black or white and that evening wore a dress of stiff white silk elaborately trimmed with lace, which was let into the tight bodice, the bottom of the flaring skirt, and the full, puffed sleeves. After dinner Mr. Sendler was separated from her by the length of the drawing-room, but she kept catching his eyes; grey eyes that opened widely and had in them something of the intelligent watchfulness of James's, and so twitched a sensitive nerve in her.

She said to Olga a few days later, during the interval at a matinée—(it was the "Queen's Proctor" at the Royalty)—"I met a German at the Abinger's the other night. A man named Sendler. He was distinctly handsome, but I can't say I like the race. And English with a German accent is not agreeable, even when it's so slight."

"Who was he? Someone connected with the Embassy?"

"I don't think so. A writer, I believe. I'm afraid I wasn't very friendly. If I see him again, I'll try to make up for it. It's unforgivable not to be pleasant to foreigners, especially when one has no good reason not to be."

"It's because of those awful Germans in Venice that year, that we dislike them," Olga said. She added, "If you fall in love and I don't it will be dreadful. You'll be certain to bore me and I shall hate you."

"How absurd you are to talk of my falling in love! I hardly spoke to the man."

"You want to see him again, obviously."

"Only to make up for my rudeness."

"There'll be nothing left for me to do but take up good works," continued Olga. "It would be much better if I were to fall in love, because you like them and I hate them."

"If you're referring to my settlement work," Laura said, half laughing, "I only do it because it soothes my conscience, and that's the poorest of all reasons. Besides, you needn't worry. I don't suppose I shall see him again."

"Would you be glad or sorry if you were to fall in love?"

"It would be misery. And I've no wish to descend to Horace's level and have intrigues."

"Never mind Horace. Tell me about this German."

"I'm afraid I don't know very much. He's travelled a great deal and seems to have made a study of colonization. He's lived in South Africa and knew Dr. Jameson in Mashonaland. I understood him to say that he called on him the other day at Wormwood Scrubbs. He said people like Jameson always did the right thing in the wrong way. I agreed with him about that, and I hate to think of the poor man in prison."

"I must say your German sounds rather interesting," Olga remarked. "Tell me if you see any more of him."

Though she seldom went out to tea, not being fond of crumpets and female chatter, Laura ordered the brougham the following week and drove to Westminster to have tea with Mrs. Abinger who had sent a note asking her to come. It was a square, Queen Anne house of dark brick with a pretty, white painted door, and Esther Abinger was the first woman of Laura's acquaintance to declare war on palms, fret work and "Turkish" cosy corners. She was a slight, fair woman with delicate, pointed features. Beside her at the tea-table was her daughter Alice, a girl of sixteen. The only other person in the room was Arnold Sendler. How could she have been rude, Laura wondered, to anyone so obviously worth knowing and intelligent as this man? She talked to him in the most friendly fashion, and learnt that he came from Munich and was the son of an English mother and a German father.

"My father's mother," he said, "was also English. My grandfather came to London during the reign of George the Fourth and was first secretary to the Embassy. He married an English girl and took her back with him to Germany. My father, in his turn, fell in love with a young English girl who was studying music in Munich. So here am I, a hybrid."

Yes, he reminded her of James. It was that open, attentive look, indicative of thoughts very active behind the eyes. Oddly enough his figure reminded her of Horace's, or as Horace's had been when she first knew him. He had that same compactness of body—she liked men to be firmly knit together, with sturdy backs and shoulders and strong legs—and she could only suppose that there existed a type which, almost unrecognized by her conscious senses, subconsciously appealed to her.

The Abingers, it appeared, were publishing a book of his on Colonization, already published in Germany, and now translated by himself. He knew a great deal about affairs in the Transvaal, and thought the situation there a difficult and dangerous one. Laura was relieved to hear that his sympathies were very largely on the side of the English. The Uitlanders were in a most unfortunate and unenviable position, particularly since the bitter feelings stirred up by the Jameson Raid, and Kruger was as stubborn as a rock and about as enlightened. Sendler had an enormous admiration for Rhodes and Frere, but he saw that there were all the elements there for a great combustion, and feared it. Besides South Africa he had also been to East Africa, Egypt and India, and hoped soon to go to Australia. But he spoke with contempt of his travels, and called them mere pleasure voyages.

"I will certainly read your book," said Laura, much interested.

It was a wet November afternoon and she had worn an old hat and a fur mantle that was three years old. She regretted that she was not looking smarter. Her new coat was most becoming, and the rain wouldn't have hurt it. It never paid to go out looking a frump.

Mrs. Abinger had given him James's poems to read, and he admired and liked them. He had read them all. "The World Dismissed." What an exquisite and perfect thing! "My little nephew," Laura said sadly, "who only lived a few months. But James has immortalized him." Later something was said, rather derisively, about the new Poet Laureate, and Sendler asked if they had read what he had just written about the Prince Consort:

> *"Sweetest Consort, sagest Prince,*
> *Snows on snows have melted since*
> *England lost you, late to learn*
> *Worth that never can return;*
> *Learnt to know you as you were,*
> *Known till then alone to Her,*
> *Luminous as sun at noon,*
> *Tender as the midnight moon."*

"I think it's very nice," protested Alice. "I don't see why you all laugh. I love, 'Tender as the midnight moon.'"

That afternoon Mr. Sendler did not seem like a stranger, nor in spite of that slight accent, like a foreigner. Humour makes every man our brother. And when he got up to go, Laura said, turning over the little gold watch she wore pinned to the front of her dress, "If you'll wait a few minutes my brougham will be back, and then I'll take you on your way."

He thanked her and sat down again, and when the carriage arrived they said good-bye to Mrs. Abinger and Alice like husband and wife who had been making a call together.

The air was so cold and raw that they closed the windows of the brougham and a perfume filled the carriage composed of warm flesh, fur and the scent of the violets that Laura wore pinned to the front of her coat. She remembered her first drive with Horace, in Scotland, so long ago, and felt again the thrill, the emotional tremor that she had felt then. She had kept men at a distance. She had not looked for adventures nor cast an encouraging eye on any that seemed imminent. But now she longed to slip her hand into this man's hand and say, "I like you, I want to know you. Be my friend." The impulse was almost overpowering.

"Would you come and dine one night?" she asked. "Perhaps the next time the Abingers come you will come too. I will send you a note."

"I shall be delighted to come. You are most kind."

"And meanwhile I'll read your book. I'll order it at once."

"Please don't. I will send you an advance copy."

"Oh, thank you. When you come to dinner—I had better warn you—my husband is a violent Imperialist, and won't allow any criticism. 'Little Englanders' are anathema to him."

"I quite understand, and I will be very discreet. But I do not only criticize, I also admire. And I admire more than I criticize."

"I know you do. You're very fair indeed. Too fair."

He scribbled something on a card and gave it to her.

"Here is my address, in case you forget it. I think you can read it, although I cannot see. Will you be kinder, even, than you have already been, and lunch with me one day?"

"Lunch with you?" She hesitated. She occasionally lunched with Sir George Humphreys at the Bath Club, but more often than not, Olga made a third. And she had lunched alone once or twice with William Abinger. But with no one else. Was it wise? No, perhaps not, but what did it matter? He would probably go off to Australia soon. She felt a sharp stab of pain, as though he were already lost to her. This was merely something between a loneliness and a loneliness, and accept it she must and would.

"I'll come with pleasure. When shall it be, and where?"

"Let it be soon, please. I have no social engagements whatever."

They agreed to lunch on Thursday at the Hotel Victoria. Arnold Sendler said he would be there waiting for her in the lobby of the hotel at one o'clock. As the brougham turned the corner of Piccadilly into Half Moon Street Laura's purse slipped off her lap with a jingle of money and chains, and they both bent forward to pick it up. Their hands touched, and a warm wave went over her body. ("I mustn't tell Olga about this," she thought. "I'll keep it to myself. Anyway, for a long time.") The brougham stopped. "So this is where you live? It's very convenient, of course. I hope your rooms are comfortable. Good-bye.

At one, then, on Thursday. Will you tell the coachman to take me home now?"

As he went up to his rooms on the first floor—a bedroom and sitting-room furnished in red plush and fifty-year-old mahogany—Arnold Sendler thought, "Now, now, can't you keep out of trouble? What's the good of it? What's the good of it, you poor fool? No good, perhaps, but when I meet a woman like that I can't help myself. She attracted me from the first. A charming, receptive and pliable mind in a very well fashioned body. What a lot of wasted strength there is in such women! They bear a few children, and nothing more is demanded from them for the rest of their lives. And she is unhappily married. *Gott in himmel!* how they give themselves away, these wives! How they proclaim the fact with every gesture, word and look to those who can see. How far could I love her? A long way, I think. All the way? It is too soon to tell. I am ready for it; some sort of final experience is due. Once I climb the Matterhorn I will ascend no more little hills. Is she the Matterhorn, or some pleasant elevation from which the view is much as other views? If she is the Matterhorn, God help us both."

On Thursday Laura had the opportunity of wearing her new hat and her new sealskin wrap with its smart little shoulder-cape, a present from Horace whose conscience troubled him just enough to make him put his hand in his pocket fairly frequently. She felt already a guilty woman, but the sensation was new and not altogether unpleasant. He was there, waiting for her, and even as she took his hand her eyes began roving about for the faces of those acquaintances who would very soon be talking about her, but she saw no one. He observed her rapid survey and thought, "She doesn't often do this. I thought as much."

"You are hoping not to be seen," he remarked, as they sat down. "This may be the longest reign in English history, but surely, now that we are nearing the end of it, its rigidity must be lessening. That indomitable old woman cannot live for ever. Does no one follow the Prince's lead and take life light-heartedly?"

"A good many do," she answered, "but I don't happen to know them. I suppose I'm what you would call a conventional woman—but conventional more by habit than inclination. I often wonder if I *could* cast off restraint now, even if I wanted to very much. I suppose I might if I once decided it was worth the effort."

"Effort?" he asked, smiling. "You call it that?"

"It would be for me. A mighty effort, now." But that was a subject, she thought, that she had better not embark upon. "Have you lived in England before?" she asked. "Do you like us or not? Tell me quite frankly, without troubling to be polite."

He said he had been to school in England for three years. He didn't think he had learnt very much there besides cricket and Latin verbs, but he had enjoyed himself. Then he went to school in Germany, and then to the University of Bâle, in Switzerland.

"Why, Bâle, when there are so many good Universities in Germany?"

He explained that his mother, though she adored his father, was by no means content that her son should be German in mentality as well as nationality. His father, willing to compromise, had agreed to three years in an English school and three in Germany. When it came to the question of a university they compromised again and chose Bâle. As to what he felt about the English he could only reply that his mother was English, and that he didn't forget that England was the home of Shakespeare, Newton, and Max Beerbohm. "And of much else that I like. But the fact remains that I am a German, and, without being at all conceited, one does not wish to be other than what one is."

"I don't suppose one does, really. It's a curious fact, too. What I would like, though, would be to be young again, and to live my life over, avoiding my mistakes."

"Still being you? Then how could you avoid your mistakes?"

"Oh, surely I could, another time."

"Impossible. And were they really mistakes at the time, or did future and unforeseeable events make them so?"

"No, I suppose they weren't mistakes at the time. Or one couldn't have known that they were. But one regrets them just the same."

"Don't regret them. I only regret one stupid thing that I have done, and I regret that because I knew it was stupid at the time."

"Don't tell me you're married!"

He laughed, pleased at this quick return.

"Yes, I was married, and that was precisely the stupid thing I referred to. It was not only stupid, but very sad in the end. I was young, I believed I was madly in love with a beautiful girl who also seemed to love me, but not long after the announcement of our engagement she fell in love with someone else, and to spite her, or to show my indifference, I married her friend, whom I did not love at all."

Laura's heart fell like a lead plummet. Everything was now altered. He had a German wife somewhere. How like life, her life, to deal her these unkindnesses! Her hopes of a friendship with this man blew away like leaves before an autumn gale. She said, with careful indifference;

"Where is she, then?"

"She died. She was always delicate, with a weak chest. When I went to South Africa her doctor thought the trip would do her good, and persuaded me to take her. She caught pneumonia on the way and died at sea. She was a very religious woman, what the world calls a very good woman. She was never unhappy with me, it was only I who was unhappy with her. We were married five years. Had it been longer, or had she not been delicate I would have left her, for I am not a man who can stand domestic unhappiness."

While he was speaking a curious thing was happening to Laura. She felt about him, as a sort of extension of himself, or saw, she hardly knew which, the presence of a delicate, pious, exacting woman. In that instant she knew her, knew what she had been like, and his subsequent descriptions of her added nothing to that knowledge and took nothing away. The impression came and went quickly, but it illuminated for her the thing that was happening, and the state of extraordinary receptivity she was in. She had fallen in love. She knew it, and knew that it accounted for her curious sensitiveness toward him from the first evening, and for the absurd disappointment she had felt at learning that he was a foreigner. Now he ceased to be a foreigner, he became simply a person, that person, himself. And when they parted that day they made arrangements to lunch together at the same place the following week.

Once again he saw Laura's rapid and apprehensive survey of the room, and said smiling;

"Come, come. Don't feel like a naughty child. We are not naughty children."

A third time they lunched. It was now becoming a necessity for them to see each other every few days. As soon as

Laura left him she counted the hours to their next meeting. If her conscience demanded of her, "Where are you going?" she replied to it, "I am not going anywhere. I am simply lunching from time to time with an interesting and charming man." One day she saw a woman she knew, and he was at once aware that she was disquieted and a little worried.

"This silly world," he said, "concerns itself too much over such trifles as whether that man is living with that woman, whether that woman will one day sleep with that man. It is like asking, 'Is that man going to eat steak or chops?' It is like whispering, 'That man has just been to see a doctor about his liver, which is unsatisfactory.' But if my mind wishes to marry your mind, no one cares. There is matter for a scandal if you like. My intelligent, reasoning, logical mind gives me no peace because it wishes constantly to be meeting your intelligent, reasoning, logical mind. It says, 'I am better off when I am with her mind. I work more clearly, more honestly. I think far better of myself.' It says, 'Kindly arrange for us to be together as much as possible. Otherwise I will make it most unpleasant for you.' When one's mind dictates to one like that, it is a very serious matter indeed."

Words like these turned Laura's will to water. A close association with a man like Arnold Sendler was, she now realized, something she had been longing for all her life. The demands of her body had been like whispers compared to the demands of her brain.

She said in a low voice;

"I understand perfectly, and I agree. But when I am with you I long to be invisible."

"And supposing your husband should hear of these most innocent meetings? What view would he take?"

"I told him when I lunched with you the first time, and he seemed quite indifferent, but he rarely shows his feelings. Since then I haven't mentioned it."

"How did you explain me to him?"

"I said that you were a friend of the Abingers, of course, and that I had met you there." She coloured suddenly. "Don't question me. You make me feel more like a conspirator than ever."

He looked at her with his clear, searching eyes.

"You are the most honest woman I have ever known. I shall believe what you tell me always."

"It's difficult enough," she said, "to say what one means —or even to know what one means sometimes. So why complicate matters still further by pretending? And I can't pretend."

"Then promise that you will never attempt to tell me anything but the truth, even though it hurts me, even though you think it may injure you."

"I do promise."

"I've known a good many women, I've been in love with a good many, but I've never really loved one. Lies and pretenses were always part of our relationship. For the first time I want something different. I want to be starkly truthful with you, I want you to be the same with me. There is not one thing in my life, past, present or future, that is not yours to know, if you care to know it. With you I need not compliment or flatter. I need not be over-nice as with some women, or over-coarse, as with some others. I can be that medley of things that I really am. You will think perhaps that I am too much interested in myself. It is true that I am interested in myself, deeply interested, but I am also deeply interested in you."

"I hated your German blood at first," she said, "now I am thankful for it. It makes you different. No Englishman would admit that he was interested in himself in the way you mean."

Once in the midst of their talk, the tears suddenly flooded her eyes and she exclaimed;

"What right have I to talk to you like this? What right have you? We speak as if our lives were our own to do with as we liked. Yours may be, but mine is not. We've been dreaming, dreaming. It's time we stopped. It's time we came to our senses."

"I am not dreaming. I am in my senses."

"No, no, Mr. Sendler, we must look facts in the face. I have a husband who gives me every penny I have in the world, for I have nothing of my own. So that I am not an independent person. Also I have two children whom I adore. It's childish for us to pretend that we are in any way free agents. At any moment I may find it necessary to end this."

"Suppose you saw me every day? And suppose your husband knew? Would he mind? What right has he to mind?"

"No moral right. But there are things a man may do that a woman may not. And if this woman he is in love with now were to prevail upon him to free himself in order to marry her, he might seize upon this as a pretext, and the worst thing that could possibly happen, would happen. I should lose my children."

"When I said I liked English laws I was not thinking of divorce laws," he said. "So you think our meetings might provide him with the excuse he wants? But so far there is no evidence that could be damaging to you, so you need not concern yourself yet."

"But it frightens me. By himself he wouldn't take any steps, but with a clever woman behind him, urging him on, he might."

"I want to see him. And I want to see you in your home, with your children."

"You'll see Horace next week, when you come to dine. And probably Horatia, for a few minutes. Richard will be at school, of course."

When she was away from him Laura was lonely, desolate. And she knew, although he didn't say so, that he was lonely without her. He avoided openly stating his feelings, for fear of forcing her into an attitude of defence. If he were to tell her he loved her, she would be obliged to say that they must not meet any more. As long as he could refrain from making the situation too clear and plain she could continue to persuade herself that there was no harm in it. Honest woman she might be, but he knew that she would act in just that way and no other. A lonely, introspective man, he had at last found someone with whom he could be wholly himself, and the thought of losing her again was now insupportable. It seemed to him that their lives had been moving slowly and inevitably toward each other. He reconciled in his own mind the two opposing theories of free will and predestination. He was convinced that he had choice, freedom of action, at the moment of acting, or before the act, but after the thing was done, looking back, he was able to trace its inevitability. Things being so and so and so it was bound to have occurred in precisely the way it did occur. Man's inability to see all the "given" circumstances gave him the impression of free will, which indeed he had, because he was unaware of the forces within himself that were making that choice inevitable.

Sendler had lived very fully, he had experienced most things, and adventures that had not come his way naturally he had sought out. His brain was extremely active and extremely curious; everything must be tried, tested, and only when it failed, put aside. His life was like a storeroom full of abandoned books that he had read and absorbed and never wanted to see again. He was without sentiment concerning his own youth. He hated it, hated what he had been, preferred always the present and had no great confidence in the future. He had had a childhood too much overshadowed by his parents, who loved him too much and too unwisely. They had regarded him as a subject for experiment, were proud of his quick brain and often gave it too much to do while it was still undeveloped. They had never wanted him out of their sight, had followed him to England while he was at school, and had lived in Switzerland during his years at Bâle. This constant supervision bored and irritated him and drove him into excesses, for it was only at such times that he felt himself free of them. Later he left home and travelled widely, returned for five years of unhappy married life, and had now been free and unhampered for three. He found in Laura everything he had longed for. Her unhappiness gave her an added value in his eyes, physically she attracted him very greatly, and there was about her a kind of serene strength that, masculine and virile though he was, appealed to the child or the woman in him and made him long to put his head down upon her breast and give himself up to her entirely. Sometimes they didn't meet for several days and he would wander about London bored and lonely and resentful, or sit in his room working at his new book on the House of Hanover which Mr. Abinger had commissioned from him, a good deal of which he had to write with his tongue in his cheek, for he was no flatterer of Royalty as Royalty, and it was a time when the plain truth about those in high places was not well received.

His book on Colonization was given a great deal of publicity and was prominently reviewed. Some periodicals praised it highly. A few of the more reactionary newspapers reviled it. One day it was referred to in the House of Commons. Horace read it and thoroughly disapproved of it, and told Laura to see that Merson showed that fellow Sendler the door if he came again. She made no reply and the matter dropped. She regretted that Horace had read the book, for he and Sendler had seemed to get on very well the night he came to dinner, and she had hoped to ask him again.

Horace's affair with Mrs. Emerson still continued. She was evidently clever enough never to criticize him or find a flaw in him, although Laura suspected that the imperious and spoilt woman was anything but satisfied with the present arrangement. Narcissus-like, Horace sought the most flattering and ardent reflection of himself that he could find, and it was evident that Mrs. Emerson still provided this. How gladly, Laura thought, she would have helped her to be Lady Leighton if only there were some way by which she could keep her children entirely to herself.

It was with some difficulty that she refrained at first from telling Olga about Arnold Sendler, but she had no wish now to share him with anyone, even her dearest friend, and as she never spoke of him, Olga quite forgot his existence, and never suspected that Laura was capable of concealing a love affair from her. As for Laura, she was as fond of her friend as ever, but she looked back with wonder upon the days when the society of a woman, any woman, had seemed sufficient to her.

Six months passed in this fashion. Laura and Sendler met twice a week as a rule, once for lunch, and once for a walk at some unfashionable hour, in the Park, or else they went for a drive in a hansom if the weather were bad, and it was very often bad that winter. There were days of fog when Laura was afraid to go out, and Sendler sat in his rooms with black depression upon him that wouldn't be dispelled till he saw her again. Once they went to a matinée, but he cared little for the English theatre, called the play milk and water, and was bored, restless and caustic, so she never took him again. She had not, in all this time, been inside his rooms or met him anywhere except in public, but one rainy day when she called for him in a hansom (the brougham had gone to fetch Horatia from her dancing class), he came to the door and beckoned her inside with such imperiousness that she never thought of refusing. It was five o'clock on a March afternoon, and he ordered tea to be brought, and Laura sat by the fire with her face carefully turned aside while the manservant brought in the tray and laid the table. She had imagined that Sendler wanted to show her some manuscripts or read aloud to her, but nothing of the sort was in his mind, and when the servant had gone he knelt on the floor beside her and put his head in her lap, his arms holding her knees. At this the tears rushed to her eyes, and she bent down and touched his thick dark hair with her lips. Presently he looked up, saw her tears, and laid his head down again. They stayed so for a long time, saying nothing, while Laura moved her fingers through his hair and listened to her own heart-beats. At last he got up and going to the mantelpiece, rested his elbows upon it.

"You need not say anything," he said. "I know you love me."

"I suppose," she said, trying to keep her voice steady, "this will have to stop."

"Stop? Why? What do you mean?"

"Arnold, you know why."

"Be quiet. Listen, woman. I cannot take you away from your husband because of your children, whom you happen to love. But you will be my mistress instead. It is highly unsatisfactory and not at all what I wish for you or for me, but it must be."

In a very low voice she answered, "You know that can't be."

"Please don't say stupid things. I am very depressed today and I can't bear them. It can be and must be. I will take the greatest possible care of you, and we will never be found out. If you say you think it a sin I will call you a liar and hit you on the head with that brass candlestick."

"Arnold, how can we? I'm not—it's impossible. I hate intrigues. I hate them. I despise Horace for what he does and is. Must I despise myself, too?"

"Your use of the word intrigue in connection with you and me is almost unforgivable, but I will overlook it. Let me tell you that you will despise yourself before, perhaps, but not after. After you will make excuses for yourself like a sensible woman, and heaven knows there are plenty to be made. You will be very much happier and so shall I. At the moment I am a most unhappy man. I don't like any woman but you, I don't want to talk to or see any woman but you, in fact any human being but you. Take off your coat and hat and let us talk sensibly. No one saw you come in and no one will see you go out, so there is no need to be nervous. I want to persuade you that you are making a mistake. I must first convince your mind. Now, tell me your objections."

"You are wrong, I would despise myself."

He stood in front of her, his eyes fixed on hers.

"You will have no regrets because you love me, though not as much as I love you. What else?"

"I've never actually known any women who—deceived their husbands, though I suppose plenty do. I've always looked down on them, not so much for what they did, actually, as for their weakness, their inability to deny themselves anything. As far as I myself am concerned I could go on like this, although I love you—more than you think. But for you—I know it isn't fair to you—"

"They also felt like that, those women you speak of, I have no doubt. Women are always unselfish angels. But I won't joke. This is serious. Now listen to me."

He walked up and down the room talking. It grew dark. He drew the blinds and lighted the gas which jumped and whistled for a little and then burned steadily behind its glass globes. He went on talking. He talked of the relationship he offered her; of its difficulties; of men and women and their similarities and dissimilarities. No man had ever opened his mind to her in that way before, and she listened absorbed and fascinated. What he said was, in effect, "This is what I am like. This is what I think you are like. Tell me if I am wrong. But I think I know more about women than you do, for I have known many, and you only half know yourself." When she answered him he made hay with her replies, tore them to bits, and showed her to herself in a new light. Her confidence in herself, in her ability to do without him, to live apart from him, weakened. She saw that the love they felt for each other was a little world, a world of delight in which she would never tire of living, and the only world in which she wished to live. She got up at last as the clock struck half-past six, for she dared not stay longer. She stood in front of him and he took her hands and placed them on his shoulders.

"Wait six months," she said, looking appealingly into his eyes. "Perhaps I can still persuade Horace to divorce me and let me keep the children. Perhaps he will really fall in love with that woman and want her on any terms. Wait just six months—and then I swear, I promise—" She faltered and stopped. He was looking at her searchingly and a little sardonically. "I know you think I'm a moral coward. Perhaps I am. But if we love each other—and we do—surely it's better to wait a little. I can't undertake this lightly. Afterwards I shall never want you to go out of my life, never. It would kill me."

She thought he was going to kiss her, but instead he kissed her hands, and picking up her coat helped her into it. He opened the door a trifle brusquely and led the way downstairs. Bareheaded he ran into the street and signalled to a hansom that was approaching from Curzon Street.

"Good-night," he said, "and good-bye. I will see you again in September."

"Arnold! I never meant that. Of course you will see me before then. Next week, as usual." She spoke to him in a low voice as they stood together on the pavement.

"I will see you in September," he repeated. The cab drew up with a jingle and a clatter, and the doors sprang open. He handed her in, with one careful hand protecting her skirt from the wheel.

"Arnold, I can't bear it. Six months to wait without so much as seeing you—" For the second time that afternoon her eyes filled with tears. The light from the gas lamps showed them to him, shining on her face, and he sprang into the cab and took her into his arms. "If you can't bear it," he whispered, "send for me. But you know what I shall understand by that."

They kissed for the first time, a kiss of agony for her.

"Good-bye," she murmured, "I think you are cruel, but I suppose you are right. Good-bye. Take care of yourself. I love you so."

He gave the address to the driver, the doors swung to and the cab clattered off, and at Piccadilly turned the corner smartly and was out of sight.

It was actually six months before she saw him again. A whole summer came and went. She took the children to Devonshire for the holidays while Horace went to Scotland for the shooting. Olga joined them for a few weeks, and the time passed pleasantly enough but for the hunger in Laura's heart for Sendler. Not a word passed between them. Pride kept her from writing, and stubbornness and an understanding of Laura's nature kept him silent. It was on March the fourteenth that they had parted. On the sixteenth of September a letter reached her in Devonshire that had been forwarded from London.

"I suppose you are still away. I walked by the house yesterday and saw the blinds still drawn. I hope you have been happy. I have had six months of hell. Please send me a note to let me know when you arrive in London. My book is half done. There is nothing else to say that I would not rather say when I see you."

The last few days of the holidays dragged interminably. They knew all the walks, they had bicycled everywhere, and now the rain had come and turned the lanes to mires, and even the children began to think of London with pleasure. Richard had been incredibly companionable and charming, and Horatia had improved somewhat in looks and was a "dear, good girl," but heavy mentally and physically. They both adored their mother, Richard intelligently and understandingly, Horatia with a blind and dog-like devotion. She followed her about, liked to sit in her bedroom, was jealous of Olga and performed unnecessary little loving acts which Laura sometimes found a trifle irksome. But she had the satisfaction of knowing that she was without a rival in their affections. Horace was not very fond of Horatia, nor she of him, and he made Richard nervous and ill at ease. Not even for Arnold Sendler would she risk a hair of their heads, she told herself, but for all that her longing to see him was almost unbearable before they departed for London.

The day she was to lunch with him she woke up with a sore throat and the beginning of a cold in the head, but rather than disappoint him she went, looking pale and feeling far from well. The sight of her agitated him extremely. She shouldn't have come, it was foolhardy, she looked feverish, was she sure she hadn't a temperature? The manner of their parting was forgotten in his solicitude and anxiety. He implored her to stay in bed for a day or two, and this she did, receiving a flood of letters from him. It was a week before she saw him again, and in the meantime she was in a state of great mental torment. She was about to take a step she had never contemplated taking; it loomed before her and shadowed her day and night. Her feverish cold made her exaggerate the risks and dangers, and she was almost ready to write to him and say she would never see him again. But as always the sight of him dispelled her fears. They went to a picture gallery, had tea, and he took her home in a four-wheeler.

"Tomorrow, at five. Come straight up. You know the way. No nonsense, no sighs, no feminine tricks. You are coming."

"Oh, Arnold, I—swear that you won't love me less!"

"Hush, be quiet! I haven't even begun to love you yet."

CHAPTER XII

Two years passed. Horatia went away to boarding-school and became the champion hockey player among forty girls. Laura went to watch her team play a neighboring school and thought, "Is that really a child of mine?" as she saw her large, plain, muscular daughter careering down a muddy field in a blue jersey and skirt and flying red sash. The child's hands were a mass of chilblains, and though they must have pained her she appeared not to care. Richard was at Eton where he was very happy, as he seemed to have the trick of adapting himself quickly to his surroundings. At Christmas time they went to Pennyfields, and to Olga's and Laura's carefully concealed discomfiture, Horace decided to go too. Arnold went back to Germany for Christmas, and he and Laura parted with the utmost reluctance, hating to be separated from each other. His objective was Berlin, but he refused to disclose his purpose in going there. When he returned in January, she knew. He had gone with the intention of supplanting, if he could, a fiery and troublesome journalist named Kutzen as London correspondent for Berlin's most important newspaper. This he succeeded in doing, by the aid of some powerful friends in that city, and returned well satisfied. Kutzen was a deliberate stirrer-up of mud, an Anglo-phobe, and a dangerous person, and far more people than Laura and Sendler were pleased by the change.

He now gave up his rooms in Half Moon Street, being better situated financially—his private income was small, and his books, not being of a popular order, brought him in little—took a small flat in Albemarle Street and had a servant of his own, an arrangement far more convenient for the lovers.

It was the year of the Spanish-American War, which so stirred up American patriotism with its slogan, "Remember the Maine," and familiarized British newspaper readers with such names as Dewey, Sampson, Shafter, Cervera, and Roosevelt. It was the year of Omdurman, of the return of the triumphant Kitchener (a greater and more god-like figure than ever now, and the Kitchener worship at Horatia's school reached incredible heights), and Sendler witnessed the frantic scenes at Victoria Station, like nothing, he told Laura, that he had ever seen before in his life, when the hero himself, owing to the excess of enthusiasm on the part of the populace, was actually in danger of his life. It was the year of Gladstone's death, of the publication of Hall Caine's "Christian," that Laura and Sendler thought a silly book. It was the time when every actress was photographed mounting her bicycle, when Edna May made her great hit in "The Belle of New York," and when people still talked with horror (but were much less sure than formerly of the hand of the Lord), about the dreadful charity bazaar fire in Paris the year before when so many fashionable people had lost their lives.

1898 slipped into 1899, and then came "Floradora," Eland's Laagte, and the South African War.

That Sendler was London correspondent in those days instead of Kutzen was a godsend. His reports were sane, temperate, and calculated to soothe irritation. And of irritation there was plenty. But he was dreadfully busy, and the time he and Laura could spend together had to be literally snatched from his work. He hated the war, though he could not, he admitted, see how England could have kept out of it without suffering a great blow to her pride, and great loss of prestige. Kruger was maddeningly stubborn; his government was deplorable; the Uitlanders had no hope of justice being done them, and the old man continued his flirtations with Germany, who certainly responded. Sendler felt the coming storm for some time before it came, and watched the words and actions of Chamberlain, Rhodes and Frere with anxiety and fascinated interest. When Chamberlain was forced to appeal to the "God of Battles" he groaned. Laura wept. War—she loathed it! Work at Leighton and Armytage was speeded up, and Horace was in his element. A French paper published a cartoon of Queen Victoria which aroused a veritable tempest, while Germany published one of the same monarch devouring a cake in the shape of Africa and exclaiming "My heart bleeds!" And in the midst of all the anxiety and war fever the papers found plenty of space for the important news that a lady was requested to leave a popular West End Restaurant for smoking a cigarette.

Laura asked Violet to come to stay with her for a week at this time, and among other things took her to see Charles Hawtry in "A Message From Mars," she having expressed a wish to go to this. Violet seemed to be very happy. She and her husband lived at Sydenham and she went out a good deal in local society, which seemed to amuse and satisfy her. The house was the sort of house Laura could never go into without feeling slightly sick, for wherever Violet could tie a pink satin bow she tied one, and wherever she could find standing-room for some china atrocity, there one stood. She had a white, woolly dog, a sort of poodle which she combed and scented and decorated with pink ribbons. Her laugh had become a constantly recurring and irritating tinkle, she was gay, coquettish and maddeningly pleased with herself. Laura could picture Sendler watching her from under his rather prominent brows and summing her up in three words. She had no children as yet and considered herself very fortunate as she was terrified of losing her figure.

"How lucky for Horace there's a real war at last," she said. "I suppose he'll make pots of money now."

"For pity's sake, hush!" cried Laura. "I try not to think of that."

"What a silly you are! Horace didn't make the war."

"I don't know who made the war, or if it made itself. I only know I hate and loathe it, and it sickens me to think that we profit by it."

A week of Violet's company was almost more than she could bear, especially as it prevented her from meeting Sendler. Only once she slipped off to his rooms for an hour while Violet was at the dressmaker's, and found him depressed and badly in need of her comfort. He hated the war as much as she did, and believed it would last a long time. He showed her a clipping from one of the papers which read;

" . . . Nor are the Boers likely to stand the strain of battle. In January, perhaps earlier, the end will come, and Kruger will perhaps be in time for the Paris Exposition."

"Fools!" he exclaimed. "Don't they realize that these men are magnificent fighters, and that they're fighting on their own ground?"

"Don't talk to me about the war. I think about it too much. Make me forget it for a while. This very hat, this very coat seems to me to be made out of men's lives."

"Then come to me. Leave him and come to me."

"My dearest, how can I? And perhaps never see my children any more? If Richard were twenty-five instead of not yet fifteen—"

"If, if, if! If this world were not the Hell's Kitchen it is! Come here."

Stubbs continued to hear from her brother Edward. He was still with the Union Pacific Railroad, and was receiving an enormously increased salary. His position must, for some time past, have been very precarious indeed, for the railway had gone bankrupt through bad organization and bad management, and he had expected every moment to lose his job. But in 1898 Harriman, that perhaps not too scrupulous but very able magnate, with the aid of Kuhn Loeb & Co. of New York, had bought the line, and it was now enjoying the greatest possible prosperity. Edward Stubbs's services had been retained as freight superintendent in San Francisco, and he now wrote from his own house in Franklin Street, "One of the best residential streets in the city." Once more he begged his sister to visit him, but something held her back. In fact the better her brother's position was, the less she seemed inclined to go. All the money he sent to her she put in the bank and she had now accumulated what seemed to her a small fortune. Laura grew a little impatient with her at times for this stubbornness. Something might happen to one of them, she said, and the other would be broken-hearted that the meeting had never taken place.

"I hope it isn't because you think you must stick to me," Laura said. "You can always come back here if you want to. And although I believe you think I'm in danger of hell fire, you can pray for me just as well in San Francisco." For she had told Stubbs, desperately needing a confidante for the sending and receiving of messages, what her relations with Sendler really were. She was aware that Stubbs often went to church at odd moments, a church whose doors were always open to those who wished to pray, and had long ago guessed why she went. Stubbs coloured at these words and said she hoped, as it was a free country, that she could pray when and for whom she wished, a remark which Laura ignored.

"Well, I've always wanted to go to America myself. I expect I shall have to take you if you're ever to get there at all. Would you go with me?"

Stubbs had been busy in her room putting things away, hanging up a dress in the wardrobe and laying some underclothes in a drawer. She had now finished, and went toward the door carrying herself, as always, stiffly erect. As she went out she turned and looked at Laura with a curiously enigmatic expression on her face and said;

"It's exactly what I've been waiting for."

They were a strange and interesting pair, the brother and sister, Laura always thought. They had extraordinary qualities of a widely different sort. There was no doubt that Stubbs was what people would call psychic. Was it at all likely that she would one day go to America and that Stubbs had a premonition of it? Less likely things had happened. But she had no wish to go now, and leave Sendler. It was bad enough having to go without him to Devonshire.

In December of that year Laura was startled to see in the paper that Mrs. Emerson was engaged to a wealthy peer. Evidently Horace's affair with her was over, and she had known nothing of it. Who, then, was now engaging his affections? But no sooner was the engagement announced than a change came over Horace. He became excessively moody and irritable, treated her with a good deal less than ordinary politeness, and to be with him even at breakfast was sheer misery. Laura was puzzled by this. Had he been then, more in love with Mrs. Emerson than she with him? It was most unlike him. But within a few days the engagement was emphatically and categorically denied by Mrs. Emerson herself, and from that moment Horace's manner changed for the better. She told Sendler this and he said, "She wants something. She did it to frighten him."

But Laura was now too happy and too much in love to care very much what was happening to Horace. She and Sendler found the most complete joy, the most perfect satisfaction in each other's society. They grew and expanded and developed, and found themselves, and were surprised at what they found. Sendler, for the first time in his impatient life, came to rest, to anchor, and rode upon the waters of a sparkling bay as proudly and contentedly as any ship that has come home through the hurricanes. His spiritual and emotional discontents were now resolved into harmony, he could love and talk as he had longed all his life to love and talk, and although they hated and groaned under the necessity of parting at all, the gloom of these partings made the happiness of their meetings all the sharper. Sendler, of the two, was the more hopeful, and Laura was for the most part glad enough to rest upon his hope and trust to the future to prove him right.

Once or twice at about this time when she went to meet him at his flat she thought she saw a shabbily dressed man loitering in the street, but when she told Sendler this he at once looked out of the window, and seeing no one, laughed at her fears. Then one day when it was time for her to go he descended into the street with her, somewhat incautiously, and as they came out of the door in search of a cab they came face to face with Horace who was walking slowly past. Laura had a thick dark veil over her hat, but so sudden and unexpected was the encounter that she gave an involuntary start. Nothing was said, Horace gave no sign of recognizing either her or her companion, and Sendler, as he put her in a hansom, assured her that all was well, and implored her not to be nervous. But she couldn't get the shabby man out of her head. He might have sent word to Horace, who might, for purposes of his own, be having her watched. She knew that such things were done. And immediately she cried out aloud as she sat in the hansom, "Richard!" for it seemed to her that she had jeopardized the love and even the safety and happiness of her son. She was overwhelmed with a sense of guilt, not as a woman but as a mother. "I should have given up everything. I should have given up all thought of my own happiness. My boy, my darling!" Visions of Richard deprived for ever of her love, at the mercy of a hard, ambitious, selfish woman flashed before her eyes. She felt a criminal. Oh, if only it wasn't too late. She would somehow make it all right, somehow, somehow! She would fight like a tigress for her children. Let Horace try to take them away from her if he dared. But what risks she had run, what dreadful risks! Of course the divorce laws were crazy, mad, wicked. In a civilized community they would be considered disgraceful, but there was no such thing as yet as a civilized community, and who was she to pit herself against the world? She worked herself up into a fever of anxiety and as soon as she reached home hurried up to her room and changed into a tea-gown, her mind tormented all the while with fears and doubts. And when Horace, dressed to go out, came to her room at half-past seven, she believed that the worst of those fears were about to be realized.

He looked handsome in a fleshy, over-fed way. He always made Laura think nowadays of club dining-rooms, race-meetings, and board meetings. His figure had thickened, his face had coarsened and there were half moons under his full brown eyes. There was hardly a trace of grey as yet in his hair or moustache, and as he stood there with his fur-lined overcoat hanging open she thought, "No wonder that woman is bent upon marrying him. He looks so thoroughly rich and successful." But she could have screamed with nervousness and apprehension when he sat down on an arm of her sofa and looked at her without speaking. Driven to speak herself because she could not bear the silence, she said:

"Horatia and I are going to have dinner up here, on a tray. It's a great treat for her."

He glanced behind him to make sure that both doors were closed, and asked:

"How long has this been going on?"

She decided at once that denial would do her no good. It was better to have it out on other grounds. She had thought out a plan of defence while she was dressing. There were at least twelve flats altogether in the building where Sendler lived, and it was reasonably certain that other people must have been seen going in and coming out besides herself.

"I saw you this evening," she said, coldly. "You thought I didn't, but I did. I suppose you had been spying on me and had a guilty conscience, or you wouldn't have walked by without speaking."

"You're quite right," he replied, "I did see you."

"It's come to that, has it? You know very well, Horace, that I've offered to give you evidence if you would divorce me and let me keep the children, but if you try to manufacture evidence against me I'll fight it tooth and nail in the courts."

"I thought I told you to have nothing more to do with that fellow Sendler."

"You're mistaken. You told me never again to ask him here, and I never have. You never told me I was not to go to tea at his flat when the Abingers or other mutual friends were there."

"Shall I go to Mrs. Abinger and ask her if she was there today?"

"Do, by all means. I wish you would."

He looked as though he believed her.

"But you've been there on other occasions."

"Never alone. He knows a good many literary people and I have gone there on several afternoons to meet them."

"You've been there three times in ten days to my knowledge."

"I believe that is quite correct."

"You've gone in alone and you've come out alone."

"Have I? I don't remember. I only know that I was not there alone."

"Why, if there were other people in the flat today, did he come down to the door with you?"

"To be sure I found a cab, of course. He didn't like the idea that I might have to wait for one."

"Is there no porter or person in charge of the door?"

"There is, as a rule, but I believe he had gone off duty for a while."

"Why didn't you go there in the brougham?"

"Because I preferred to walk. I intended walking back as well, but found it was rather late so changed my mind."

"Knowing how I dislike him, why have you continued the acquaintance?"

She was about to say, "Knowing how I dislike Mrs. Emerson—" but she realized in time that the comparison would be damaging to her.

"You have a number of friends, Horace, whom I dislike, but that has never made any difference to you. And I didn't suppose that your dislike of him was as great or as personal as you now suggest. I thought it was chiefly his book that you disapproved of. Now I want to know, please, why you have had me spied on?"

"I guessed there was something up. And I believe there is."

"You hope there is, which is a very different thing." Suddenly she worked herself into a fury. "How dare you, how dare you? *You,* who have been consistently unfaithful to me since the third year of our marriage! Some woman has goaded you into this. I know it. You're doing it to please her. It isn't like you to do it, I know it isn't. You'd never have thought of spying on me by yourself. If you'll be happier married to some one else, for God's sake let me go, but let me go with my children, for I'll never go in any other way."

"Must I remind you, Laura, that they are my children too?"

"Oh, I know you don't want to lose them either, but you don't love them in the way I do. You can't. You hardly ever see them. They're everything to me, everything. Horace, Horace, be fair. Don't be persuaded to resort to trickery and subterfuge. It's unworthy of you, and vile. If you want to marry someone else, I promise you I won't stand in your way, but the thing must be done decently and fairly. It isn't very pleasant for a woman like me to have to give the evidence, but I'll do even that, if you'll let me do it in my own way and if you'll agree that the children shall be entirely mine. I can't say more than that, I can't do more than that!"

He got up and began buttoning his fur-lined coat. He had evidently believed her. He seemed convinced—or she only thought so. It was so difficult to tell, with him.

"Are you going to continue to have me followed? If you do, Horace, I shall tell all your friends, and mine too. The Abingers, Olga, Sir George, the Lowenthals, the Lockyers, everyone. It's outrageous, and you know it."

"You seem to think," he said, "that you are the only one with any feelings whatsoever. I am extremely fond of my children and I would make great sacrifices for them. I have made sacrifices—more than you know. But of course you have never credited me with a single good quality. I am black all through. The fact that you believe this has been largely responsible for the failure of our married life. But it is too late to talk about it now." He took up his opera hat. "I am not altogether sure I believe what you have told me. Naturally you will try to protect yourself. It's quite possible that I may continue to have you followed. And as to your telling our friends, they will understand that if I have taken such a step it is because I have good reason for doing so."

"I think they will know better than that. But we won't argue the point. What I want to know, Horace, is this. Do you hope to find me innocent, or do you hope to find me guilty? Tell me."

Horatia knocked on the door and came in at that moment. Her long brown hair hung about her shoulders in shining ringlets, and down to her waist. She wore a school-girl frock of pink silk trimmed with olive-green bows. She went to her mother and kissed her, and then to her father, uncertain whether he wished to kiss her or not.

"Good-night, papa. What a pity you're not having dinner here with mamma and me. It would be so nice."

"Thank you, my dear, but unfortunately I must go out. I have a dinner engagement." He bent his head and kissed her. She looked at him with shy admiration, and then said, with the intention of paying him a compliment, "You *do* look a man about town!" He laughed, but was not at all amused. "You think so, do you? Well, good-night, my dear. Good-night, Laura."

Laura echoed his good-night as he went out.

"You'd better not use expressions that you've heard, my darling, and don't quite know the meaning of. Your father wasn't altogether pleased at what you said. But never mind. It was well meant, I know. Sit down and look at those books if you like. Or wait a minute, ring the bell for Stubbs, will you please? I want her to post some letters for me."

She went to her writing desk and hastily scribbled two notes. When Stubbs came she took her into the hall and whispered to her, "I'm in awful trouble, Stubbs. Sir Horace has been having me watched." Stubbs face looked the picture of dismay. "However I lied, and lied. Oh, God! I'm sick of life! Here, these must both be delivered tonight, so put on your hat and coat and find a hansom and drive fast. There's no telling what he might not do. He wants to divorce me and marry that woman," she explained.

Stubbs gave a little moan. "What won't men do?"

"And women too. Oh, Stubbs, I'd like to climb to the dome of St. Paul's tonight, and jump off. Now you must go."

Stubbs hurried away and Laura returned to Horatia wondering what Esther Abinger would think of that strange letter, full of half truths, and not daring to think of what

Sendler would think of the other letter, or how she was going to continue to live from now on. She found that she was trembling, and she lay down on the sofa feeling utterly weak and spent. Horatia asked her if she were tired and if she would like her head rubbed with eau de cologne.

"Yes, I'm tired. Perhaps I shall feel better when I've had dinner. Read to me a little, until it comes. There's Mrs. Oliphant's 'Autobiography' that I've just started. It's very interesting."

Horatia took up the book and sat herself down by the sofa. Her long curls fell on either side of her face and Laura thought that she looked almost pretty. Sendler had only seen her once, but he had thought that she had possibilities. He had never seen Richard at all. In about ten minutes he would get her letter. He would probably be alone in his rooms with his manuscripts about him, or writing his article for the Berlin paper. And presently he would have dinner, alone. Alone. Was ever man more alone than Sendler? A wave of compassion for him swept over her, making her want to cry out in her pity for him. She turned her head aside, biting her lips to keep back the tears.

"Am I reading too fast, mamma?"

"No, dear, very nicely. Go on."

She was only on the brink of realizing what separation from him would mean. Fear for the children's sake had blotted out other emotions, and the thought of seeing him in a few days built up a little ephemeral screen between her and the real future, the future that would have to be lived without him. What remedies were there, she wondered, against the terrible, preposterous pain of his loss? How fortify herself, how prepare? How live, how rule her thoughts and longings? Her mind flinched from the thought of her own desolation, and dared not face the awfulness of his. Stop thinking, stop thinking! Think of Mrs. Oliphant. Listen to Horatia. Thank God, they're coming with the tray. Oh, Arnold, Arnold, it is possible that never again—Stop it, you fool!

"Sit here, dear, on the sofa by me. That's the way they dine in Paris, sitting side by side. What is there, Merson? Soup, whiting, chicken casserole. That sounds very nice. To drink? I don't know. Yes, a pint of champagne. You'd like ginger beer, darling? Very well, Merson. No, I won't have coffee tonight."

Surely they could meet at the British Museum or some such place just once more. She mustn't run any risks. Anyway she had suggested the British Museum. The print room, no one ever went there. She'd take care that she wasn't followed. "Another chilblain! Let me see. I wish you'd hurry up and outgrow those horrid things, Horatia, but I didn't stop having them myself till I was married, and I don't suppose you will either. It seems odd that doctors can't do anything for them, doesn't it? I suppose they're not interested. If a thing doesn't kill you they don't bother much." Is it possible to die of heart-break she wondered? Surely one might easily die from just not wanting to live. "Horatia, would you mind going to bed rather early tonight? I don't feel particularly well, and I'd like to go to bed early myself. You can stay up late another night. No, it isn't exactly a headache. I just feel rather miserable." Thank God for sleep—if it would only come. And as later she lay with wide-open eyes she knew that he was sleepless too.

The next day a discreet note came from Esther Abinger.

"MY DEAR LAURA,

"I quite understand, and will of course do anything I can.

Ten years ago Edward was almost as bad, and all about nothing. How silly they can be!

"Always yours affectionately,

"Esther Abinger."

She told Sendler not to write to her for fear that Horace might feel disposed to open her letters. With that woman goading him on he might do almost anything. She was fairly sure that she was not, at the moment, being followed, for she had kept careful watch and had seen no one, but even the faint doubt made her extremely nervous, and she developed a sensitive nerve between the shoulder-blades that was constantly warning her of a surveillance that was most probably imaginary. On the day she had planned to meet Sendler at the Museum she gave orders that she would not want the brougham as she was only going to Jay's and Peter Robinson's to shop, and would therefore walk. She did go first to Jay's and then to Peter Robinson's, and it was from the crowded door of the latter that she slipped out and into a four-wheeler.

No vehicle followed her to the gates of the Museum, and as she went up the steps she was as certain as it was possible to be that she had either not been followed at all or had eluded her follower. She hurried up the stairs and along a corridor and through rooms where she had gone so many times with James, and of late years with Richard and Horatia, and at last reached the print room. She saw Sendler at once. He was looking at the Dürers with his back to her, but at the sound of her footsteps he turned around and at the first sight of his face her will turned to water. He looked pale and ill. His eyes were dark and heavy, his whole face looked bruised. He came toward her with a smile that wrung her heart. It reminded her of the look she had once seen in the eyes of a dog that had been run over and that James had brought into the house in Kensington Square. Whenever they approached it to try to ameliorate its pain it looked at them with that wan and pathetic welcome that she now saw in Sendler's face. They spoke no words of greeting, but Sendler took her wrist and gripped it in his hand, and led her towards a seat. Under his eyes she now saw more clearly those dark bruise-like marks that come from pain and sleeplessness. They looked at each other and the tears sprang into her eyes.

"You can't give up your children," said Sendler. "I understand that."

She explained, "If anything were to—happen—they would have that woman as a step-mother. I would never see them. Their lives would be completely changed. I mustn't take any more risks. She has him under her thumb. He might do anything."

"I know that."

They sat miserably, holding each other's hands, looking miserably into each other's eyes. They were two people condemned to that long death-in-life that separation means to a man and a woman who love each other and are in perfect sympathy.

"Life without you," Laura said, her voice very low and broken, "will be almost unbearable. If it weren't for my children I would have no wish to go on living. I must go on for their sakes, but I'm not all mother—and all the rest of me will die."

He held her hands very tightly, twisting the fingers in his. He possessed a nervous system that was admirably constructed to receive pain, and she knew that his sufferings were certainly no less than hers. With his insight into her needs and nature, he was well aware what the loss of himself would mean to her, starved as she had been of all that he was able to give. He sat very close to her, his head bent, his eyes upon the fingers that he bent and twisted in his own.

"Listen. You are really my wife. You are not his. You're only his possession, because he holds your children as hostages. I've never liked life. It's too full of these man-traps, these gins, these snares. Man is the most hunted and tortured of all the animals. But with you life could have been worth living, and you are the only woman in the world who could have made it worth living to me. But I shall go on living it because I have a hope. I'll speak of that later. You have been happy with me, Laura. Say so. I want to hear it."

"Oh, my dearest, I have never been so happy in all my life, in spite of my fears and doubts. I shall never be so happy again, never, never."

"Don't. Don't cry. Lift up your veil."

She raised her veil and he wiped the tears from her cheeks with his handkerchief. She seized his arm and held it with frantic fingers, and fresh tears crowded down her face. "Must this really be our parting? I can't bear it! Oh, I think we are the most unhappy people who have ever lived."

He took her hands again.

"You know that for myself I don't care, but I must think of you. To go on meeting would be very dangerous for you. We might be unobserved for a while and think ourselves forgotten and grow bolder and so fall into a trap. And you would always feel that you should not have run that risk." He put an arm about her and rested his head for a moment on her breast. "This is where I should like to stay for ever. This is where I should like to die." She took his head in her hands and kissed his hair, his neck, his forehead, then suddenly drew away for she heard footsteps. A shabby man walked by, glanced back at them and went on. She turned a frightened face to Sendler.

"Isn't that the same man? Oh, you never saw him. I believe it is. How could he have followed me? I was so careful. Oh, Arnold, perhaps I shouldn't have come!"

"Hush, hush. You see how it is? We would see spies in every lamp-post. The world would seem full of shabby, furtive men—as indeed it is, and they come here often enough."

"He might have followed you. I never thought of that. Was there anyone, do you think?"

"I didn't look. I don't think so. Anyway, he has gone now, and if he was a spy he has seen us and the harm is done. So forget him."

"It makes me realize," she whispered, "that this is really the end."

He made her hand into a fist and enclosed it tightly in his own, then opened the fingers one by one. "Listen to me, Laura. I wonder how much you love me? I wonder what time will do to your love? Kill it, presently? Make it fade slowly? How can you tell? You can't." He spread her fingers wide apart so that she nearly cried out with pain, then pressed them violently together. "I'm a fool. You can't tell."

"There are two things that I know," she replied in a low voice. "That I will never love anyone but you, and that I will love you until the day I die."

He looked younger in his grief and helplessness than she had ever seen him, and her heart yearned over him. He was thirty-eight, a young thirty-eight, a year older than herself. She knew that there were difficult and painful tears in his eyes and that his misery was like a hundred knives, piercing and stabbing him. He was so alone, so alone. He cared for no one but her. Those three years he had made no intimate friends and wished to make none. She had become all women to him: and although he saw men constantly in his work there were only one or two with whom he was on terms of friendship. They liked him but they found him argumentative and opinionated, and extremely reserved, and they didn't, as a rule seek him out, nor he them.

"Laura, I think I will be going away from London."

"Arnold! Where, my dear?"

"Perhaps back to South Africa, if I can arrange it."

"As war correspondent? Oh, please not there. So far away, and dangerous—no, no, you mustn't. I won't allow it."

"Hush! Be quiet! Do you think I *want* to go so far away from you?" He tore at her fingers. "I must. It's better that I should go a long way."

"Oh, no, no! Please!"

"Stop crying. Hush, I tell you." He bent her middle finger back till she gave a little moan. "That hurts, does it? Good. Bear it this once. I tell you I must go away from England, but you will always write to me. If you stop writing I shall know—I shall think—you know what I shall think."

"My letters might go astray. Never think that, promise me. Promise! It will never be that. I'm yours, for the rest of my life. I belong to you, for ever. Oh, believe it, or—"

"Hush. That's enough. Be quiet a minute." His nails bit into her palm. "How old are your children?"

"Fifteen—Richard. Just. And Horatia sixteen and a half."

"In five years, six years, it won't matter. They can decide for themselves. You can tell them. Then I'll come back. I'll be somewhere about. I don't know where. I don't know what I'll be doing. But I'll come back then." He bored his knuckles into her palm. "Six years hard it will be. Won't it?"

"Oh, no, before that perhaps—"

"No. Don't deceive yourself. I know you better than that. Better than you do yourself. It will be six years. I shall see you all the time. I have been cultivating my powers of visualization. Often, after you leave me, I can see you all through the day. I can see you undressing at night, raising your arm to turn out the gas before getting into bed, the sleeve falling back." He bent her thumb backwards as far as he could. "I've followed you into some strange places."

She leaned closer to him and laid her lips on his hair, thick, dark, vigorous hair, threaded with grey. It was silent in the room now. Not a footstep sounded. He raised her hand to his lips and bit it, not gently.

"I'd like to mark you, in fifty places. I wish I had. You've been my mistress for three years. Do you remember the fuss you made? You thought you'd be sorry. Are you sorry now?"

"No, no, my darling. My poor boy."

"I knew best, didn't I? I always know what's best for you. Remember that. What's my banker's address? Tell me."

"In London or in Munich?"

"In London, of course. I'm not going back to Munich. What is there for me in Munich? Nothing but the memories of a fool. In Everyman's cupboard there isn't a skeleton, there's a fool. What's the address? Let me hear you say it."

She repeated it.

"Are you going to forget it?"

"Is it likely? But, Arnold, why can't you write to me?"

"Where? How?"

"Address your letters to Stubbs, my maid. Miss Martha Stubbs. She knows—I told you she knew."

"Is it safe? It's you I'm thinking of."

"Quite safe."

"Then I'll do that. But not too often. You must write to me every day, or nearly."

Footsteps sounded, and the shabby man passed them again.

"It *is* he, it is, I'm sure it is!"

"No, it isn't. Sit still. Who cares if it is?"

"Oh, my darling, I ought to go."

"Go, then, there's nothing to wait for now."

"Don't talk like that. Be kind to me. Oh, be kind!"

"Kind!" he cried. "Kind!" He took her into his arms violently and kissed her, bit her lips, her chin, her cheeks, released her, seized her again and kissed her with a kind of wild despair, tore himself out of her arms and stood irresolute, blinded with his own tears, then turned and ran out of the room. Laura sank down on the seat again, numb, sick with misery, her eyes closed, her hands pressed to her face. He was gone, gone. It was over. He was gone. Six years. She wouldn't live six years. And as for him, was it likely death would spare him, that shining, unique mark? Perhaps one of Horace's bullets—even correspondents get shot—she saw him in danger, dying, and sobbed aloud. Oh, God, oh, God! Why should love be punished so? The kindest, most unselfish and tender love fared worst in this world of silly, man-made laws. “Oh, God, I don’t want to live without him. I can’t live without him,” she moaned; then got to her feet, hearing footsteps. Wiping her face hurriedly and drawing down her veil she went toward the Dürer etchings and pretended to be looking at them. It was an attendant who had come in. They would be closing in a few minutes, he told her. She thanked him, and with bent head, pulling on her gloves, she went slowly out.

CHAPTER XIII

Did the year 1900 usher in the new century or wouldn't it start till 1901? People argued about it a good deal. To Laura it was a matter of no importance. It would be just as long to 1905 or 1906 whether it was already the new century or not. She spent the holidays with the children at Pennyfields, and the Edward Abingers were also there. Olga now knew the story of her love affair, but she had told no one else. She had to go to her old friend for comfort in her dreadful misery and loneliness, but it was little enough comfort she got at first, for Olga was too shocked and hurt to be sympathetic. Olga, the daring, flirtatious girl was far the more conventional woman of the two ("Although only *that* man and no other in the world, could have persuaded me to do what I did," Laura would insist.) But she was a little happier after Olga knew. She had someone then to whom she could speak of Sendler.

The war dragged on. People's sons and brothers were killed in the far-away Transvaal (although it was considered shocking bad luck when this occurred, just as it would be if a man were killed at polo or on safari). Still, killed they were, and enteric took its toll, and the watching nations, like idle sportsmen about a cock-pit, looked on. The Queen worried herself ill, sent chocolates to every private soldier as a New Year's present, and took the war very hard. Everyone recited "The Absent-Minded Beggar"—"Duke's son—cook's son—son of a hundred kings." Kipling plucked a patriotic nerve in the breast of every Englishman and woman and set it vibrating. And such popular songs as "Soldiers of the Queen" at the Alhambra helped people to forget that the war was other than a rather splendid adventure—an adventure which sometimes went wrong, of course, as adventures will, but the spirits of "our brave Tommies" would always rise to meet any catastrophe.

Laura, restless and incurably lonely without Sendler, went to consult Madame Voyer of Vigo Street, the famous seeress who, many people said, was better than Cheiro. But she got little from her—nor, in her heart, had she expected more—beyond broad generalizations and the uncomfortable assurance that someone she loved was in danger. She began to lose weight about this time and to feel that it would be pleasant to go to bed and stay there for three or four years. She wore a long paletot of grey cloth that season which made her look alarmingly slender, and even Horace noticed it and urged her to see a doctor. She wrote twice a week to Sendler, excellent letters, and received through Stubbs (who was supposed to have a nephew in South Africa) scrappy, passionate notes from him written on odd bits of paper and seeming to come hot from his pen. The war was now more or less over, but guerilla fighting still continued, and skirmishes were constantly taking place. The Boers refused to consider themselves beaten, and it would be some time, he thought, before peace was more than a name. He had met old friends, and had been too occupied, on the whole, to be precisely lonely, and he had a great fondness for Africa, besides. He could best describe its towns by saying that they left in one's memory an impression of corrugated iron and whisky, but the veldt exercised over him the same attraction it exercised over most men, and he wished that some day she might see it too. To come back to England was out of the question, for if he did he would come straight to her. He adored her more than ever. She had wiped all other women off the face of the earth and he thanked heaven for it, as women had been a source of trouble and danger to him all his life and now he was done with them. She shivered happily at this and longed for his arms. Never once in her letters did she voice her most obsessing fear—that when he returned he would find her too old, too changed. "Oh, years," she prayed, "be kind, so that he can look at me again with love and happiness in his eyes."

Horace grew heavier, more gross, less percipient, richer, more ardent in the pursuit of his own pleasures. After spending part of a winter at Cannes with Mrs. Emerson and her sister and some friends of theirs he returned and suggested, to ease his conscience, that Laura might like to have the house done over and the new bathroom put in that she had for some time been wanting. These things were done, and a telephone was installed as well. During the winter of 1900 he learnt that he was to be given a baronetcy in the New Year—small joy this to Laura, who dreaded an increase of social duties and responsibilities. And no sooner had he received the congratulations of his friends, than an event of the first importance took place. The Queen, who had been ill at Osborne, died of an apoplectic stroke, and the great Victorian Age was at an end.

The Queen was dead. Those small, plump hands with their grip of steel relaxed and were folded in sleep, and it seemed as though History itself paused before slowly and deliberately turning a fresh page. She had rounded off the longest reign by a successful visit to Ireland, long contemplated and long postponed, and the German Emperor had lately visited Windsor and everything had gone off very nicely. And now that the war, which had hastened the end, was practically over, there seemed no reason to linger. Things were becoming too much for her. People's habits changing in ways that she did not like, and there were these horseless carriages that were being so much talked about, which must have seemed, to a person of her years, so dangerous and unpleasant. The Prince of Wales was enthusiastic about them, and already an eight horsepower Panhard had been driven all the way from Paris to Wales—barring the sea passage.

It was a new century and a new era—and yet, Laura wondered, was it, except for a few mechanical contrivances, very different? There was nothing new, for instance, about the average person's point of view, and she sometimes wondered if there ever would be. Wouldn't it be centuries, still, before people began to think rationally? To think clearly and honestly, and without prejudice or passion? How many rational people had she ever met? Only three—Mr. John, James, and Sendler. They were in the same tradition, Sendler perhaps being the least rational of the three, for his feelings were more passionate. But all had that broad tolerance toward, for instance, the point of view of foreigners, so rare in a world seething with violent national prejudices. They all possessed that excellent temper which results in a kind of politeness toward the beliefs and convictions peculiar to other persons, provided those beliefs and convictions were not forced upon anyone. Only toward the tyrannical did they harden their hearts. As for her, she did her best to think rationally, about Horace, about her love for Sendler, about life in general. She read William James's "Will to Believe," which interested her greatly, and to please Sendler she resumed her German lessons, and tried to read Schopenhauer and Nietzsche in the original—no easy task. She managed to get through "Also Sprach Zarathustra," but "Wille zur Nacht" proved too much for her, and Schopenhauer she found sufficiently difficult in English. She tried hard to formulate as clearly as possible her own opinions and beliefs, and decided that if she were forced under any banner whatsoever, it should be the banner of the Benthamites.

She wrote a long letter to Sendler expressing these views and ending by describing to him what London was like at the time of the Queen's death, with purple everywhere, and black shutters up in all the West End shops. Even the bus drivers had tied crêpe bows on their whips. She had taken Stubbs and Horatia into the Park to see the funeral, an unforgettable sight. They had stood on a little rise of ground close inside the railings and seen very well. She described the dark leaden sky, the long lines of grey-coated infantry, the muffled drums, the booming of the minute guns, the absolute stillness of the crowds who gazed with wet eyes upon the gun carriage that bore the coffin under its white satin pall; the German Emperor riding with set face; Roberts, the darling of all England, riding with his aide-de-camp; King Edward, unmatched in his own peculiar dignity; the rhythmic shuffle, shuffle, of perfectly trained feet; the branches of the trees along the route cumbered with boys and men, like black fruit; and except for the muffled drums, the silence, the silence. The tears had run down her cheeks all the while, and now, while she was describing it to him, they were running down her cheeks again. The Queen had presided like a plump, black-gowned, domesticated goddess, a Grundy-like deity, over all her life, and even over her mother's life, and now she was gone . . . she was gone.

Articles on bicycling were still prominent in every paper, but motoring notes were beginning to creep in, and actresses had to make up their minds whether they wanted to be photographed mounting their cycles or sitting stiffly at the wheel of a pugnacious-looking little car somewhat out of proportion to themselves. Mrs. Langtry was photographed in the tonneau of her new Singer, and it was not long before the same model was on order for the Queen. Presently there came a rush, a spate of orders, and when the King made known his enthusiasm for this new kind of locomotion there was no doubt but that the day of the motor car had dawned indeed. And though drivers had to take care not to exceed the speed of a traction engine, few spirits were damped by this discouragement.

It was at Easter, in 1902, that Richard called his mother's attention to the experiments of a man named Marconi with a kind of telegraphy without wires. They went together to hear a lecture on the subject, and were much impressed. That same week she took both Richard and Horatia to see "Are You a Mason?" which at once became Richard's favourite play. He bought photographs of all the players, and was indeed the child of his time in that the stage drew him like a magnet. He fell in love with Gertie Miller, in "The Toreador," but it was an ideal love, and he expressed no desire to meet her, a fact which brought Laura some comfort, for several of the young men she knew were proving a grave worry to their parents from this very cause.

At seventeen Richard was tall and exceedingly well-made. His features, which had been excellent when he was younger, were now somewhat blurred and swollen-looking, as though he had slept too hard, but this, Laura knew, would pass. He was gay, affectionate and unreserved, and his views on religion were the views of the average boy of his age—that while it was a source of considerable embarrassment and discomfort to himself, it most probably had a good effect on others. He agreed with Laura that it was possible to love virtue for its own sake, that it was possible, in fact, to acquire a tendency to virtuous conduct, "even when the reward which the virtuous man receives from the consciousness of well-doing is anything but an equivalent for the sufferings he undergoes or the wishes he may have to renounce." Horatia, however, was entirely different. She couldn't endure the mention of an expected baby, disliked allusion to any part of the body not revealed by clothes, and "the facts of life," in spite of Laura's efforts to make her see them reasonably, shocked and disgusted her from the first. As she had treated the two children precisely the same, she concluded that this was a peculiarity of Horatia's own, and hoped time would cure it. She talked, like many another girl of her age, of wanting to go into a convent, showed no wish to "come out," or to meet young men, and altogether was proving very difficult. Hockey and basket-ball seemed to have done little for her, and she was clumsy and unlovely in her movements. Her hair was her only claim to beauty, and although she was eighteen she elected to wear it hanging about her shoulders, school-girl fashion, in long, shining ringlets.

When fighting in the Transvaal ceased, Sendler went back to Germany. His father was dead and his mother had remarried, at sixty-four. Germany, he told Laura, was now a regiment. The common man and woman regarded themselves as private soldiers in a great army, and excessive patriotism, that dangerous form of mass conceit, had reached alarming heights. People were drilled into vociferously loving their Kaiser and Fatherland. "It is no longer a country for the individualist," Sendler wrote. "My affection for England is regarded with suspicion, and my fondness for French wines and French literature with disapproval, while my admiration for American progress is looked upon as treasonable disloyalty. As I cannot yet come to England I think I will go to China or Japan. One place is very like another when only one woman's face has any meaning for a man, when only one woman's voice can bring him comfort, when he seeks one woman down every path and through every room, and feels himself to be utterly silenced because he cannot speak to her."

At about this time Laura began to take a good deal of trouble with herself. She kept her figure admirably and without effort, and was a delight to her dressmakers, but she was not so sure of her face. She made Olga promise to tell her if she saw any changes taking place. So far she herself could see few signs of the years, although she was within a few weeks of forty, but she feared that these might perhaps escape her and strike another person.

"I'm glad I'm not in love with anybody," said Olga one day when she was lunching at Stratford Place. "It seems to be a great worry to women of our age."

"It is, when six years or so have to elapse without a meeting. If he were beside me all the time it wouldn't matter. Sometimes I wonder if I can live through it. The time seems endless, Olga. Endless!"

"But when he comes back, what are you going to do?"

"I'll find out first how the children feel about it. If I am sure I can keep their love and sympathy, I'll ask Horace to divorce me, and tell him I've—it seems a ridiculous expression in this case—I've been unfaithful to him."

"And suppose he won't?"

"Then Arnold and I will simply go off and live together—that is if the children are settled and happy, and it does them no harm."

"How can you think of living with a man without being married to him? I couldn't. All your friends will cut you dead, of course, or nearly all. I shan't, but I'll probably be the only friend you'll have."

"Esther Abinger won't cut me. And if you and the children still care for me I shan't worry about anyone else."

"I couldn't do it," Olga repeated. "I'd feel so terribly ashamed."

"You wouldn't if you loved someone very much."

"Yes, I would. And one can never be quite sure of remaining in love. And suppose he were to grow tired of you? He'd be perfectly free to leave you whenever he wished, and then how could you ever hold up your head again?"

"My dear Olga, a man of honour would find it more difficult to leave a woman he was not married to than to leave his wife."

"You may be mistaken in him. Look how mistaken we both were in Horace."

"We were very young then," said Laura, controlling her rising annoyance. "Besides Horace, I had known only two or three men, and those very slightly. And there are plenty of people even now who think Horace the sum of all the virtues."

"Well, I don't believe Horatia will ever forgive you."

"Oh, Olga, don't! The outlook is depressing enough already. I'm so hoping she'll outgrow all her queernesses, and become like any other sensible girl. It was a mistake to send her away to boarding school. She hadn't any of these queer ideas before then."

"I shouldn't worry if I were you. She's almost sure to outgrow it, especially if you don't do anything to upset her."

"I shall insist on her coming out next season, whether she wants to or not. It will change her thoughts."

"Well, I don't envy you having to tell the children the truth eventually. After all, whatever you may say to them, you've been an immoral woman and you can't expect them not to be upset about it."

This harsh and censorious attitude on Olga's part might, Laura feared, caused a rift in their friendship. She had difficulty in keeping her temper sometimes, and such words as "You've been an immoral woman," repeated themselves irritatingly in her memory. She decided it would be better not to see Olga quite so often for a while.

"I mustn't be angry with her. Arnold would only laugh at such a remark." She dreaded to lose the Olga of other days, the Olga who had shared the horror of James's and Lilla's deaths, the pangs of Horace's unfaithfulness, the joys of the children. "Everything will be all right if I take care not to lose my temper with her. It's partly jealousy, I realize that, and when she knows Arnold herself all this will be forgotten."

In the spring of 1904 Horatia, now nearly twenty, was persuaded to make her bow to society, and was presented at the first Court of the season. But in spite of her mother's efforts and the money forthcoming from Horace to launch his daughter successfully, she was not at all a success. Laura yawned behind her fan as she sat talking to other mothers (and oh, what deadly dull women most of them were!) against the wall, while Horatia yawned openly on the ball-room floor, or in the supper-room or the conservatory. Nor was May Week at Cambridge any better in spite of Richard's efforts to make everything go off well. Laura was immensely popular with the undergraduates, Horatia not at all, nor did she make the smallest attempt to be. "I am ready to wash my hands of the whole business," said Laura afterwards in despair.

It was the year of the making of the Entente Cordiale; of the Russo-Japanese War (that people called "the greatest war of modern times"), and contracts from the Russian Government kept Leighton and Armytage humming; of President Roosevelt; of the pompadour and the "kangaroo dip" affected by ladies; of the opening of the St. Louis Exposition; of Ethel Barrymore's visit to London, when she played in "Cynthia." And it was the year that Horace's affair with Mrs. Emerson came to an end. Mrs. Emerson married the "well-known sporting peer" to whom her engagement had been announced—and denied—before, and Horace exhibited neither depression nor bad temper. Laura soon knew why. The camera was very busy in these days at race-meetings and other gatherings patronized by society and the stage, and this combination (so popular in England!) was presently most happily exemplified by Sir Horace Leighton and Miss Louie Langton—the alliteration was not the least happy thing about it—standing side by side watching the finish of the 3.30 at Newmarket, or of the Oaks at Epsom, or inspecting jumpers at the Richmond Horse Show.

"How bad for Richard to see these!" was Laura's first thought. "How beastly for mother!" was Richard's, and when he next came to London he spoke of it. "How much shall I tell him? How much does he guess?" Laura wondered. "Is it too soon to tell him the whole truth?" What she dreaded above everything was that she might kill his love for both his parents with one blow. "He has found his father out. Must he find a flaw—and he may think it worse than that—in his mother, too?"

She shirked it. "Remember he has always been a good father and in some ways a good husband," she said to him.

"Well, he's never starved or beaten us, of course," Richard admitted. "I've suspected things for some time," he added. "One day last spring I went with him to the City, and coming back we called at a house in Grosvenor Square and took a Mrs. Emerson out to lunch. He told me never to mention it, but I don't care now, and I could see they knew each other awfully well. She made up to me like anything. She was awfully handsome."

Anger leapt up in Laura's heart like a flame. How dared he take the boy there?

"I don't want Horatia to know anything about it," she said. "She never looks at the illustrated papers, so perhaps she won't."

"Oh, Horry!" he said with a laugh. "She never sees anything."

"What are we going to do with that girl?" she asked him. "She reads a few novels, plays 'Pansy Faces' on the piano, and seems to live in a kind of dream. But what she dreams about I can't discover."

"I'd take her for a trip around the world if I were you," he said.

Sendler's letters began to show signs of greater impatience. He was tired to death of wandering, but he would go on wandering until she sent for him. He was now in Pekin, watching, he said, the awakening of China, which was learning with surprise that an Eastern nation, when it adopted Western methods, was capable of holding its own against and even defeating a Western nation. His book "The House of Hanover" had been a greater success than he had expected, and he was now writing articles for the Berlin papers and an occasional one for the London papers. These Laura showed to Olga. "It's good journalism, no doubt," said Olga, "but you can't compare his writing to Arthur's."

1905 dawned. People went wild over "Peter Pan"; they laughed at George Robey as the Widow Twankey in "Aladdin"; they took up ju-jitsu—"every lady who walks alone should be able to protect herself"; they made a great to-do over General and Mrs. Stoessel, the defenders of Port Arthur; they thought the telephone one of the wonders of the world, gaped at dirigible balloons and argued over the comparative merits of different makes of motor cars. The Grand Duke Sergius, the uncle of the Czar (the "saddest man in Europe") was assassinated, and people thought what a dreadful country Russia must be to live in. And yet only four years ago hadn't poor President McKinley been shot, at the Buffalo Exposition, and wasn't America the freest country in the world? So where was anyone safe? Laura, who had a good memory and a time sense, knew how soon people forget alarms and grow accustomed to wonders, and how quickly wars have a way of seeming futile and pointless, to which rule the Russo-Japanese War would probably prove no exception. She read the papers with a tolerant eye and sighed at the futility of things and people. Only Sendler could propel her into vivid reality again.

Her chief worry at this time was about Horatia, that difficult girl. She remained shut up within herself, made no friends, clung to her mother yet refused her confidence, was dull and spiritless, and welcomed none of the suggestions made to her. Horace was thinking of buying a place in the country. Would Horatia prefer that to living in town? She didn't think so, she didn't know. She didn't care. Exasperated, Laura one day spoke to Horace when they were alone at breakfast, Horatia having gone upstairs.

"Something must be done about that child. We must think of some way of taking her out of herself."

"And what, my dear, do you suggest?" He habitually spoke to her in these days with a kind of exaggerated deference and politeness which had now almost ceased to irritate her.

"I think I ought to take her abroad."

"Have you any special trip in mind?"

"Well, you know how many times I've tried to persuade Stubbs to go to see her brother in California. I thought she and Horatia and I might go out there together. A trip across the continent of America ought to give the child something to think about."

"I felt sure you would suggest something costly."

Laura had lately been into a jeweller's shop where she was not known, and had had shown her, by a confidential salesman, a string of pearls bought for Miss Louie Langton by a well-known baronet. She had drawn her own conclusions, and was not disposed to show Horace much mercy.

"It concerns the girl's whole future. I'm really anxious about her, and I think some such trip is absolutely necessary."

He gave her one of his forced smiles.

"You look upon me merely as your banker, I know."

"You could hardly expect me to look upon you as a husband or a lover, could you, Horace? However, we needn't discuss that. I thought we would be gone about three months altogether, and I think we ought to start in the autumn, if possible. Even if we stayed away for Christmas it wouldn't matter very much. It would be the first time, and Richard could always go to Olga's."

"I've no wish to put obstacles in your way. If you think the trip really necessary—"

"I do."

"Well then, there's no more to be said. Tell Horatia that you have the consent of your banker. She needn't show me any gratitude. I don't expect it." That day, lunching with Miss Langton, he told her what a cold, ungrateful woman his wife was. "And she came to me without a damned sou."

"I loathe women like that," responded the lady warmly. "I'm just the opposite myself. I want to give all the time. If anyone does you a good turn, show him you're grateful, give him something back, that's what I always say."

Early in November, when the time for sailing drew near, Horatia was stricken with appendicitis, a fashionable ailment just then, and an operation was considered necessary. They therefore put off the journey until the middle of February, and then sailed on one of the newer Cunarders. It was an eight-day trip of great comfort, even the weather was surprisingly good. Laura played a little bridge, a game she had lately learnt, and they sat with agreeable people at the Captain's table. Horatia gave signs that she was waking up a little, but she responded hardly at all to the overtures of friendliness made by some of the young people. Since her operation she had grown fatter, and the present style of dress did not suit her, outlining the figure as it did with merciless plainness. She couldn't make her waist look small and loathed corsets. In a fur coat she looked particularly shapeless.

As they drew into the harbour an American lady pointed out the Flatiron Building with great pride, and Stubbs, whose long, strongly boned face rarely showed emotion of any kind, was surprised into exclamations of wonder as they drove through the city toward the Hotel Savoy, near Central Park. Horatia, too, showed pleasure and excitement. "How long can we stay here?" she asked, and Laura, gratified by this interest, replied, "As long as you like, my dear." "Not much fear of getting lost here," Horatia remarked. "I like these long straight streets." A bright blue sky looked down on them, and the air sparkled. Glimpses of the Hudson River showed them floating ice blocks, and the Palisades opposite were lightly powdered with snow. "I dare say there'll be a fog in London," observed Stubbs. The hotel was hot but comfortable. Laura bought a guide book and conducted her little party to all the places of interest, preferring, herself, the Metropolitan Museum. They went to the opera and heard Caruso, and to the theatre and saw John Drew. Stubbs and Horatia seemed content to stay on in New York indefinitely, but Laura felt it was high time the brother and sister came together, and they had been informed by telegram that rooms awaited them at the St. Francis Hotel. A blizzard strengthened their willingness to depart, and they embarked on their first long train journey in the first week in March. Snow lay all along the route. Chicago was in the grip of the coldest weather for thirty years and they were thankful for the comfort of the train once more.

Certain minor difficulties presented themselves to the mind of Stubbs in connection with their stay in San Francisco, but these Laura brushed aside with contempt. She had all along intended to do without a maid there, she wished Stubbs to consider herself her friend merely, not her maid, and asked her to address her while they were in California as Lady Leighton, or, if she liked, Laura. "I've no class feeling at all, and never have had," she said. "Well, I have if you haven't," rejoined Stubbs.

Not until they crossed the Rocky Mountains did they see the bare earth again. Horatia was all interest, all excitement. "I've kept her too much in London," thought Laura. The last day of the journey they put aside their fur coats and sat in their shirt-waists, as they were learning to call them, for the heat in the cars had not yet been turned off. As the train drew into the station at Oakland, Stubbs put her head out of the window and said, "There's Edward." She hadn't seen him for over twenty years. Laura saw a well dressed man in a grey suit looking up at them and waving. He was large, muscular and not unhandsome, with the fresh colouring of a Gloucestershire farmer. She knew him to be forty-three. He kissed his sister as though they had parted yesterday, and made no comments upon her changed appearance. "Evidently a man of tact and sense," thought Laura.

"I'd begun to think you ladies were never coming," he said, and Horatia explained what a good time they had been having in New York. "That's almost the first time I ever heard her speak spontaneously to a man." her mother thought.

Edward Stubbs escorted them across the bay where his Winton Six ("Well!" exclaimed Horatia) awaited them, and drove them to the St. Francis Hotel, as fine a building as the Savoy, and quite as comfortable.

"How do you think your sister is looking?" Laura asked.

"Fine," he replied. He seemed to be a man of few and simple words.

At the first opportunity Laura sent a cable to Sendler, telling him to write to her there. She now felt nearer to him than at any time since they had parted in the print room of the British Museum. She felt younger, too, away from Horace and from the things and persons she had known all her life. Here she was a new person, born again. It was spring in California, and the hills about the bay were softly green. Showers were frequent, but soon over, and the sun was bright and warm. They were amazed at the steepness of the streets, and at the cable cars that clanged up and down them, at the size of the violets, sold on every street corner, at the lively, self-satisfied city so far from "everything," and so reminiscent in a hundred ways of Paris. Edward took them to all the places of interest; Chinatown, the Presidio, the Golden Gate. They went in the Winton Six to a great grove of redwoods some miles away, and even ascended Mount Tamalpais. Edward had not had a holiday for two years, had been waiting, in fact, for some such excuse to take one, and he was therefore entirely at their disposal. At his own house he was a charming host, and Laura and Horatia were delighted with the meals prepared by Hing, his Chinese cook. Except that his table manners left something to be desired, and that he used his tooth-pick somewhat indiscreetly, Edward Stubbs, Laura considered, was in every way a satisfactory and estimable person.

"You must be very proud of your brother," she said to Stubbs more than once.

"I hope he'll know where to stop," was her reply. "There's not many in this country do, it seems to me."

It was in San Francisco that they saw their first film, and the effect was somewhat like looking at scenery through a picket fence from a moving train. Films had been shown from time to time in London, since they first made their appearance in 1895, but Laura had imagined them to be childish things, comparable to magic lanterns. Now, however, she was rather impressed, even though it hurt her eyes to watch it. She saw President Roosevelt making a speech, and was amused by his flickering gestures and the flickering movements and gestures of the crowd.

"It shows us for what we are," she remarked, "extremely active and ingenious monkeys."

Horatia was surprised at the freedom taken by or accorded to the young people of her own age. Co-education was in itself startling enough, but even away from the universities young men and women seemed to be together as much as they pleased, and as far as outward behaviour was concerned differences of sex appeared almost to have vanished. Laura also observed this, and knowing that there are no ideas in the world more contagious than ideas of freedom, she guessed that it would only be a matter of time before young people in England would be going about as unrestrainedly as the young people here. Well, so much the better, she thought, and was conscious of a pang of envy that all these changes had come about too late for her. A friend she had made on the boat, an American woman, had given her some letters to people in San Francisco, and for Horatia's sake she presented them, and they were soon showered with invitations. "I know you meant it for the best, mother," Horatia said, "but I'd much rather just go about with Edward Stubbs." The movements of "the beautiful Lady Leighton" presently began to be chronicled in the society columns of the papers, and Laura soon regretted her temerity more than Horatia did. They talked, vaguely, of returning to England, but so great was the improvement already noticeable in Horatia that Laura felt it would be a mistake to hurry back. They decided to wait for the spring wildflowers and for the opera, and to start homewards toward the end of April.

Stubbs was staying with her brother, and Laura and

Horatia had rooms on the fourth floor of the hotel, rooms done in the somewhat bastard French style then so popular in San Francisco. On the evening of April 17th Edward Stubbs bought seats for the opera, and they all went. Caruso was singing and the house was packed. Edward had bought his sister a black satin evening gown, and she looked quite handsome in it. It gave Laura an extra satisfaction to know how much Horace would have disapproved. After the opera they went on to Tait's for supper, and then they drove back to the St. Francis, where the two ladies were left, while the brother and sister returned to Franklin Street.

"I think Edward Stubbs is the nicest man I ever knew," said Horatia that evening, as she unfastened Laura's dress, Laura having performed the same office for her.

"He is nice, but what was wrong with some of the young men you know in London, and why do you like him better?"

"He doesn't try to make me talk. He says something, but I know he doesn't expect me to answer, particularly, unless I want to, and I know he isn't comparing me to a lot of other girls who are prettier and more amusing than I am. I don't feel shy or stupid with him. He tells me about the early days here, or what it's like to work in a gang on the railroad, and I just listen. Or I tell him what it's like to live in London, and he just listens."

"When we get home," Laura said, kissing her, "you shall live in the country. We'll give up London if you like."

"I believe I'd like to live here," said her daughter.

Laura lay in bed thinking about Horatia, analyzing her nature and coming to conclusions about her, as she had done many times before. But now she felt she understood her better. Her mind was too heavy, too slow, to provide its own entertainment. Like most people who loved strangeness, newness, the excitement of change, her mind provided no excitements of its own, but required the stimulus of sights and movements. San Francisco with its unusual, feverish, cosmopolitan life, the oddness of its steep streets, the buffeting of its winds, its position at the edge of the Pacific, its nearness to the primitive and at the same time its sophistication, delighted the girl, though she was quite unable to analyze her own feelings about it. "Nob Hill," with its grotesque palaces inhabited by millionaires, fascinated her. This man made his fortune in the gold rush of '49, that one out of railroads in '70. Edward Stubbs knew the histories of them all. She liked the lively songs young people were singing; "Under the Bamboo Tree," "My Sweet Alona," "Won't You Come with Me, Lucile, in my Merry Oldsmobile?" "Won't You Come Home, Bill Bailey?"

"I shall hate to take her away, when the time comes," Laura thought, as her eyes closed.

She awoke in a pale dawn, terror-stricken. The chandelier in her room was swinging, her bed rocking, all about her was a roar and a rumble frightful to hear. She sprang out of bed and was flung off her feet, picked herself up and made for the door between the bedrooms crying out, "Horatia! Horatia!" The door wouldn't open. She heard Horatia calling to her, and then they both rushed out into the hall and met.

"Oh, my darling, you're all right! It's an earthquake. Stand here in the doorway. Hold on to me." The corridor was full of screaming people in their night clothes. Crash, crash, roar and rumble. Was the whole city falling to bits? It sounded like it. Their faces paper-white, they clung together. "It's no good trying to get out . . . all those stairs . . . Oh, my God!" Plaster was falling; there was a crash in Horatia's room, and white dust came drifting out. "It's stopping, it's stopping. I wish those people wouldn't scream so. Can you stand?" "Just," said Horatia, whose knees were trembling. "Then we'd better get some clothes on and get out." Her arm about her daughter, Laura went into the room. "Oh, my darling, look, the ceiling has fallen on your bed! No, don't look at it. Put your clothes on, quickly, and I will too." Together they forced open the door between their rooms and dressed within sight of each other. "I'm not going to wash," said Horatia. "Nor am I. Lucky the whole building didn't fall about our ears." The screams still went on, the earth still trembled, and roars and crashes sounded both near and far away. Laura, going to her window, saw, through a pall of grey dust, dogs running crazily about the streets. The square in front of the hotel was packed with people in their night clothes who were afraid to go indoors again. The sun was rising, and the soft, veiled sky of early morning was turning blue. "I suppose we ought to be out there too," Laura thought, her fingers blundering and fumbling with hooks. "There may be another earthquake." "Hurry, darling," she called out. "Take your trinkets if you like, and your fur coat. I'm taking just jewels and money and my fur coat. I'm nearly dressed." There was one thing more, Arnold's photograph. "Where did I hide it? I remember, among my underclothes." She slipped it, in its soft leather case, in the inside pocket of her coat. Together the two picked their way down four flights of stairs over fallen plaster and scattered clothing. Two women and a man, injured, were being carried down. Outside in the square some more injured were lying on blankets, receiving medical attention. Wild rumours flew from mouth to mouth in the crowd. Whole buildings had fallen, killing all inhabitants. The Call Building, San Francisco's skyscraper, was down. The earth had opened to the south of the city and swallowed a whole community, houses, people, church and all. Laura saw Caruso and some of his company huddled up in dressing-gowns and overcoats. "If it had happened last night, when theatres were full!" someone said, and his hearers nodded. Laura looked up at the hotel and was surprised to see that it showed few signs of damage. Other buildings about the square had not been so fortunate, and there was one with its front fallen away. "I don't like," Laura said suddenly, her face toward Market Street, "the look of that smoke." "Where?" Horatia looked too, and saw a black cloud slowly mounting behind the buildings about the square. It rose evilly and heavily, and hung in the air like a great pall. It darkened the sky and the smell of it was in their nostrils. Laura felt sick with dread and alarm, but there was nothing to do for the moment but wait there for Edward Stubbs, who would, she felt sure, come to look for them. "Unless," she thought with sudden panic, "something has happened to them." People began to flood the streets, carrying great bundles wrapped in blankets. "The city's burning," someone said. "The whole place is on fire." A young man with red hair came and spoke to them, overhearing their talk and knowing them to be strangers. "This'll be a great place for architects," he said with a wry smile. "Are you an architect?" Horatia asked. "Yep. Just been down to look for the office, and find the fire's licked it up already." "Will it come here, do you think?" "Sure it will. What's to stop it? The water mains are busted." "Then our trunks, our things, will just have to burn, I suppose," said Laura. "You might try sprinkling holy water on 'em," the young man suggested. He added, "I'll stay and look after you, if you like.

My folks are all in the East. We'll have to do some hiking pretty soon from the looks of things." "Hiking? What's that?" Horatia asked. "We'll have to hoof it—leg it—beat it." "Oh, walk. But where?" "Out Presidio way, like as not." "We have friends in Franklin Street," Laura said. "Do you know if there's been much damage there?" The young man didn't know. "Better begin moving," he urged, cocking a blue eye towards the approaching pall. "I suppose we'd better. They're taking the wounded away," said Horatia, watching prostrate forms being lifted into ambulances. "I'd like to wait just a little longer," Laura pleaded, "in case our friends come. Otherwise we might miss them altogether." "All right. If they don't come pretty soon we'll have to skidoo—skidaddle. Had any breakfast?" "Oh, no, we haven't thought about food. What time is it?" "Six-thirty, time to eat." Just then Laura saw Edward Stubbs pushing his way through the crowd toward them, followed by his sister, both fully dressed, but pale. "Here you are! Thank the Lord! Better come out to my house," said Edward Stubbs. "She's firm as a rock. My car's been commandeered to carry dynamite, so we'll have to walk." "Dynamite?" "Yes, they're trying to check the fire that way." Laura and Horatia turned to their young friend and thanked him warmly. "I'll walk along with you for a way," he said. They thought no more of their things. In her mind, Laura had abandoned them. They were all alive and unhurt, and nothing else seemed to matter. "I must send a cable to my husband," she said. "I doubt if you'll get a cable through from here," the red-haired young man said. "I'm going to get across the bay if I can, and if you'll give it to me I'll send it from there." Again she thanked him and wrote out two cables on a bit of paper, and gave him money to pay for them. "I can never thank you enough. Take care of yourself. I wish we might meet again." She had lost her heart to the sensible, laconic youth. He said good-bye and vanished in the crowd, and they never saw him again. She knew he would send those cables if it were humanly possible to do so, and was thankful she had managed to get one to Sendler as well. On their way they saw terrible sights, sad sights, comic sights. The streets were crammed with a flowing stream of refugees from the burning districts. Once they felt another but much less violent tremor, and people crowded in terror into the middle of the street, away from the danger of the buildings. It was soon over and they pushed on. They stopped at a wine-shop and drank sherry, and at a grocer's—he was just opening his shutters—to buy biscuits. Horatia was thrilled by the whole proceeding. "Fancy *me* being in a great earthquake! What a lark!" was what she felt. Edward found that his Chinese cook had fled and that there was no gas to cook with. "A nice country you've got," was his sister's comment. It was the first, last and only criticism Laura heard her make of America. They rested, washed in the small amount of water that remained in the pipes, and watched with the detached air with which fellow sufferers regard one another, the streams of people going past. The air was thick with smoke and from time to time the house was shaken by dynamite explosions. At four in the afternoon a soldier came and ordered them to vacate the place. They might be obliged, he explained, to dynamite it soon, and they wanted everyone out of that district. Edward packed a suitcase with clothes and papers and Stubbs did the same. They set out once more, homeless now. "Tonight," said Edward, "we'll sleep with some friends of mine near the Presidio." They stopped in Fillmore Street for half an hour and Laura and Horatia were able to buy night dresses and tooth-brushes, and other toilet necessities, Edward having considered it unwise for them to go into the hotel again once they had got safely out of it.

It was a lovely day, neither hot nor cold and quite cloudless, but the sun, owing to the smoke, looked blood red and cast a strange, coppery light over scenes that were strange enough in themselves. Edward and Horatia walked in front, Laura and Stubbs behind, talking over the terrible thing that had befallen that gay city. Suddenly Laura saw Horatia put her hand on Edward's elbow to draw his attention to something, and he captured it and tucked it under his arm, where it remained. The two figures in front of her at once took on a new significance.. She looked at Stubbs to see if she had noticed and saw the same look on her face that she had once observed there when Stubbs had accidentally come upon Horace in the bath. "She's shocked," Laura thought. "Ought I be shocked too? How do I really feel about it? He comes of good Gloucestershire stock, and though his sister happens to be my maid she is more my friend than my maid, and anyway I care very little for that. He has pulled himself up out of obscurity by ability and hard work. He is liked and trusted and has fine qualities, and I would trust Horatia with him absolutely. She isn't everybody's choice, poor child, and he is the first man she has liked and been natural with. He's too old for her, but she has never got on with young men. Horace would consider it quite out of the question, and I suppose I ought to talk to her and tell her not to like him so much, but I must go very warily because of that stubbornness of hers." She called Stubbs's attention to a ruined church with fallen steeple, and next door to it a saloon, untouched. Families sat on their door-steps, mistrusting their houses, and watched the crowds going past as they themselves had watched them a little earlier.

"We'll never forget this, Stubbs," said Laura. "Did you foresee it?"

"I've stopped foreseeing things," was the reply. "It's a worry, knowing too much."

By seven o'clock they had reached their destination, the house of a railroad man named Spedding. He and his wife received them very cordially and though the house was already filled with relatives they were offered sleeping accommodations on sofa or floor. "Sleep? I shan't sleep," cried Horatia. "Edward is going to take me out to watch the fire." "I expect we shall all want to do that," Laura said. They had a picnic meal of bread and cheese and fruit and California wine and then went out to a vacant lot on a hillside and watched the advancing sea of flames. Miles away though they were, they could have read a newspaper by their light. Later they slept a little, and early in the morning Edward went out to gather information. He learnt that the streets leading to the Ferry Building were now clear—burnt out—and that boats were running to the towns across the bay, which, it seemed, were practically uninjured. He made up his mind to get his little family out of the city as soon as possible. The fire still raged, but was thought to be under control, and though his house still stood he had little hope of ever seeing it again. So once more they set out, and after nearly two hours' walking, reached the Ferry Building, the laces in their shoes burnt by the hot cinders through which they had passed. While packed inside the building, waiting for a boat, there came another tremor, and a panic, horrid while it lasted. Laura's thoughts flew to Richard and Sendler. "My darlings! I was thinking about you at the last." But calm was established again; Edward's broad back kept them from the worst of the press and his strength helped to make a path for them on to the boat, although not until the gang-planks were up did Laura breathe quite freely. It seemed like heaven on the water, though there were anxious folk who talked of tidal waves. Edward took them to a hotel in Berkeley and got them a double room, while he and Stubbs slept at the house of a friend not far away. They would stay there, he said, for the present, or until they knew how things were going in San Francisco. As they were getting ready for bed that first night, half dead with weariness, Horatia suddenly turned to her mother and said;

"Mother, what a wonderful country, where things like this can happen! And isn't Edward simply marvellous? I want to marry him and live here, and he wants to marry me. Would you mind very much if I did?"

CHAPTER XIV

Laura and Sendler were on their way back to London, Laura from California, with Stubbs, Sendler from China. She had advised him by cable that the time of waiting was over. Horatia and Edward had taken matters into their own hands and while waiting to hear from Horace—Laura having written a diplomatic letter—had got themselves married by a minister in Oakland, so that his peremptory "No, certainly not. Return at once," came too late. It was exactly the reply they had expected and Horatia was canny enough to know that such an answer would only put her mother into a difficult position, for whatever her own feelings in the matter might be, she would be obliged to obey Horace's commands. But when the thing was done, it was done, and there was nothing more to be said. Edward regretted that a secret marriage was necessary and pleaded for Laura's forgiveness precisely as if he had not known it was already his. For Laura knew that Horatia would be happy. That odd and difficult girl had found exactly what she wanted, and Edward was a capable and level-headed man whose progress had by no means ceased, and who knew very well how to take care of a wife and family. Putting every selfish consideration aside (and an unmarried Horatia might have proved a serious obstacle to her life with Sendler), Laura believed that things had happened for the best. She wished Edward had been younger, but apart from that she had little fault to find with him, and his table manners had already been modified by his sister. Stubbs was inclined to blame her brother, but Laura wouldn't allow this. "Blame my daughter. She fell in love with him almost at sight."

She had left the newly married pair settled in the house in Franklin Street. It stood on the edge of black ruin, having been miraculously spared by a change of wind, and Hing the Chinaman had reappeared in time to begin cooking their meals on the little iron stove in the street as their neighbours' meals were being cooked, until all chimneys should have been inspected and repaired. The city was under martial law and Laura had seen a looter shot on a doorstep with his spoils in his arms. The miles of black destruction depressed her, but not so her daughter, who looked forward to seeing a new city rise from the ashes.

She was certain of Horatia's happiness, but not until she was on the boat sailing back to England did she fully realize how she was going to miss her. She had had a daughter, an odd, difficult, puzzling child, without beauty; but she had been a devoted shadow, she had been her right hand, and for twenty-three years she had hardly been out of her thoughts; every detail of her life, her health, her character, had been of importance to her. And now she was a young married woman who lived six thousand miles away, whom she would see perhaps once a year, but no more. For the first time she realized the full sadness of it. And she had Horace to face, a Horace who was by no means pleased at what had taken place. But saddening and worrying as these things were, she had only to tell herself that Sendler was on his way to England to make them assume reasonable proportions. With Sendler there, she could face anything.

Richard got leave from Cambridge the day she returned and met her in London. He told her he had spent twenty-four hours of agony before her cable came to say that she and Horatia were safe. "My poor darling! I got it off the moment I could." "You must have done. I think it was the first to be received in London." At the house they found a note from Horace to the effect that he had two important meetings in the City but would see Laura at dinner that evening. "Very considerate of him," said Richard, "for now I can talk to you alone." He told her she was looking handsomer than ever. "I've gained half a stone," she informed him, "in spite of all the excitement and worry." "It suits you." He turned to Stubbs who was in the room and said, "she's a fine woman, isn't she, Stubbs? My God! You're my sister-in-law now. What am I going to call you?" "You'll call me Stubbs, I hope, as usual," she replied, colouring. "This wants a lot of thinking over," he said. "In my opinion you ought to give up being mother's maid and set up housekeeping for yourself somewhere." "That seems to be your mother's opinion too," remarked Stubbs, picking up her mistress's hat and gloves and folding her veil. "Well, why don't you?" She looked appealingly at the two of them. "Just let me do as I please, won't you? It's all I ask."

Laura told Richard everything that had happened, but she found she couldn't speak of Sendler, partly because she was afraid of breaking down, partly because of her desire to see him before imparting her secret. His face had grown faint, the outlines uncertain. Though scarcely able to draw a given object, she could sketch faces from memory and by rubbing out and correcting she could often arrive at a very satisfactory likeness. She had often done this with Sendler's face, creating something that pleased her more than any photograph, and recalled him to her more sharply. As soon as she had seen him she would tell Richard, and then if all went well with her son, face Horace. When Richard left her, to return to Cambridge, she went to her room and picked up and opened all the books Sendler had given her, which were on a shelf near her bed. Touching them, all the incidents connected with their giving came back to her, and tears flooded her eyes. The pathos, oh, the pathos of the past! Nearly six years ago! Was she quite the same woman who had tremblingly climbed the stairs to his room, who had rejoiced so deeply in the physical as well as the spiritual comfort she had got from him? Were those joys to be experienced again? Could they be? These things depended even more on Sendler, she knew, than on herself, for it was he who struck the key, who set the pace. A sudden terror came over her, and she stood by the window with her hands over her face. Absence from London, the return to London had shut her off a little from her own past, so that instead of continuity there now seemed to be a break, a gap. But a break, she told herself, that would be mended by one word, one look from him.

Horace was still so angry about Horatia's marriage that he didn't trouble himself even to simulate pleasure at Laura's return. He gave her a quick embrace, a mere touch with his moustache upon her cheek and launched at once into reproaches, so that Laura was forced to defend herself, her daughter and her son-in-law with spirit.

"Edward is a very fine man indeed. A man, in many ways, after your own heart, in that he's ambitious and successful. And reliable and honest beyond any question. The child adored him from the first."

He helped himself to a second brandy and soda.

"You should have been on your guard against it. It was your duty to prevent such a thing. You're her mother. It wouldn't have happened if I'd been there, that much I know. The brother of your own maid! It will get about, you'll see. I suppose the servants know already."

"Only Merson, and he is perfectly discreet. Stubbs may be my maid, but in many ways she's like a sister to me, and I'm devoted to her. That part of it doesn't worry me at all."

"The fact that the marriage is highly objectionable to me naturally means nothing to you. I would have made Horatia a generous settlement. She could have married anybody; anybody."

"That indeed she couldn't. I know my daughter's limitations."

"Do you suppose I spent all I did on her education and bringing up to see her married to a fellow like that? And now she'll have to spend the rest of her life living at the edge of nowhere, in a God-forsaken place if ever there was one."

"San Francisco is a lovely city," Laura said, "full of fine houses and shops as good as Paris shops, and pretty and well-dressed women and nice young people. Or it was, and will be again. And California is wonderful, it's so varied and enormous. It has deserts like Egyptian deserts, and forests like Norway. The moment Horatia set foot in it she made up her mind that she wanted to live there."

He looked closely at her, disregarding her words. "I believe you had some ulterior motive in throwing her at that fellow's head. Or was it simply done to annoy me?"

She got up and took a cigarette, lighting it herself. She rarely smoked, but thought it would now help her to keep her temper. "My dear Horace, do you suppose for a minute that I am pleased that my only daughter lives six thousand miles away from me? Hasn't it occurred to you that I miss her, and will miss her more and more? But I do like and admire Edward Stubbs and I know he will make her happy. If you had given her a large dot it's quite probable that she would have married a fortune-hunter. She didn't care for any of the marriageable young men she knew here. In fact she was a most difficult girl, and we ought to be thankful she's in such good hands. From the moment she met Edward she began to change for the better. All her old morbid shynesses and fears left her. You'd hardly know her now. She was growing so much like your sister Maud that it frightened me, and you know you always say that poor Maud ought to be under lock and key—although I don't at all agree with you." She laid a large envelope on the table. "Here are some snapshots and other photographs of Edward, and the house, and of San Francisco, and of Edward and Horatia together. . ."

"I don't wish to look at them. I think you have acted like a fool; like a fool."

She picked up the envelope again and got to her feet. "Very well. I only want to say one thing more. I couldn't have prevented it. Her mind was made up, from the first. I could only have got her away by using force, or guile. Remember that it's very easy to get married in California. And at least her fate won't be mine, which is something to be thankful for." She turned and went out of the room, leaving Horace pouring himself out another brandy and soda. "It's not a bit of use my talking to him any longer," she thought. "He will only become more and more unpleasant." And so their first meeting ended, with angry feelings on both sides.

Olga came up to London to see her, and to hear all about the astonishing events in California. But the moment Sendler was mentioned she tried to turn her from her purpose.

"At our age, to throw one's bonnet over the mill seems rather silly. Surely the time for romance is past and gone. If I were you, having put up with Horace all these years I'd go on putting up with him. You have position, a lovely home, money, comfort, friends, and you may be giving up all those things for a mere will-o'-the-wisp. It's true Horatia's no longer a problem but I think Richard will feel it terribly. I really do. He is much fonder of you than most boys are of their mothers. I don't know how you can risk it."

"It's just that that makes me feel I can risk it," said Laura, hiding her own trepidation.

Olga had grown heavier, her features had thickened, her dark eyes had grown a little prominent and the whites were slightly tinged with brown. She dressed with extreme care and discretion and always in black, and was still a noticeably good-looking woman. What troubled the more fluid Laura was the static condition of her mind. Instead of absorbing fresh ideas and moving forward she chewed the cud of the past years and resented changes in her friend. "You used not to like so and so. Why do you now?" A love affair, Laura considered, would have done her all the good in the world.

"She's made up her mind not to like Arnold, I know," she told herself when Olga had gone, "so our friendship will probably cease as soon as I leave Horace. It's sad, sad, sad, but how can I help it?"

It was the end of May when Laura got back to London, and, judging by the papers, two events seemed to be occupying the minds of Londoners to the exclusion of all else. The fact that the Derby had been won in record time, and that the newly married King and Queen of Spain had nearly been assassinated in their carriage when returning to the Palace after the ceremony. In the second week in June she received her anxiously awaited letter from Sendler, boldly addressed to herself. He was in a hotel just off St. James's Street.

"My dearest," he wrote, "I am safely arrived and you will come to see me tomorrow afternoon. Come straight up to my room. I will tell them, if you like, that I am expecting my cousin at four. I cannot possibly see you first in a public place, and if they do not like your coming to my room they will ask me to leave and I will quite cheerfully do so, for I do not think I am going to like this place very much."

She wondered, while she was dressing to meet Sendler, if Horace had forgotten about him. He knew he had left England for she had told him so, and although he never spoke of him she guessed that he was often in his mind, a deep-lying irritant, helping to justify his own actions in his own eyes, even actions which had taken place years earlier. In fact, knowing him as she did, Laura could surmise that he had persuaded himself it was because of his lack of faith in her that he had turned to other women.

She went out at three, dressed in a neat, navy blue tailor-made with a long tight-fitting coat cut away at the front, a neat little toque, and a spotted veil, through which her skin and eyes looked radiant. She did some shopping and then made her way down Regent Street to St. James's

Street, thinking, "In fifteen minutes, in ten, in five, in two, I shall see him." She asked boldly at the desk for Mr. Sendler, saying she was expected and would go up, for now people could think what they pleased; it didn't matter any longer. A small page conducted her upstairs and knocked on a door and Sendler opened it, and before she could speak the door was shut again and she was pulled forward into his arms.

She had pictured their meeting hundreds of times, and had always seen it as acted slowly. She would go into the room where he was (sometimes in her visions he was in her own drawing-room) and find him with his back to her. He wouldn't face her until they were alone, with the door shut, and then he would turn slowly round, and after a long look at each other he would slowly open his arms, and she would go to them.

He did nothing of the sort, but snatched her to him and kissed and embraced her so violently that had not extreme happiness made her impervious to pain she would have cried for mercy. As it was she murmured once, "Oh, dearest, my poor face!" but it had no effect. A little judicious and carefully arranged make-up went to limbo, her hat was pulled off, tearing her veil, her hair disarranged and undone. The man was beside himself. He was like a dog who sees his master after a long absence and goes mad, leaping and racing in circles. So Sendler had gone mad, and there was nothing to be done but yield until the fit was over, until the whirlwind of love had subsided. Not until Laura, weak and spent and unspeakably happy was arranging her costume again did he address a single word to her.

"Well?"

"My darling, you've made the six years vanish like smoke."

"When will you leave him?"

"I haven't told him yet. I had to see you first."

"To be sure, I suppose, that you still loved me."

"To be sure that you could still love me, once you saw the changes in me."

"Such as there are I expected. I will point out a few changes in myself. My liver, for one thing, has suffered. Both South Africa and China have left their claw-marks on me. I have a wound in my right foot, of which I didn't speak to you at the time. It was caused by a stray bullet in the Transvaal that was not meant for me, and it makes me slightly lame in damp weather. My mind, on the other hand, has improved and clarified. I am now more certain of a great many things, for instance, of the futility and silliness of almost all human beings, with the exception of yourself and myself, and of the necessity of our living together at the earliest possible moment."

She flung her arms around him and strained him to her.

"You make me so happy. How I wish we were both ten years younger! I won't waste time now, I promise you. I'll write to my boy tonight and tell him everything, and as soon as I hear from him I'll tell Horace."

"Are you frightened of Richard?"

"No. Yes, in a way. Oh, you can guess how I feel."

"I can. But suppose he says, 'If you do this, I won't see you any more.' What then?"

"He won't. He won't."

"But suppose he does."

She turned away and went to the window, where his eyes followed her. She stood there, a gracious outline, silhouetted against the light, her head bent as she tried to fasten a hook at her wrist. "I don't know."

"Come here." She went to him again, and he took her in his arms. "Listen. A son who does not wish his mother's happiness is not worth his mother's tears."

"But never to see Richard again, even though I thought him stupid and cruel, would simply kill me."

"And not to see me again?"

"Don't frighten me. Don't speak of such a thing. I know it will be all right. I know it." Her arms tightened round him. "Haven't we suffered enough? Haven't we been punished enough by being separated all these years? Must we be punished still more?"

"Hush. You'll cry in a minute. And where is your logical mind? Who is punishing us? Who would be likely to punish us? Whom have we wronged or hurt? Aren't you being silly, feminine, hysterical?"

"Yes," she admitted. He drew her to a stiff and uncomfortable sofa and they sat quietly, her head on his shoulder.

"Absence from the person you love," he said, "apart from the pain of it, is a curious and rather interesting experience. The absent one divides into two people; the one you knew (that one becomes static, fixed, like a picture), and the one who goes on living her own life apart from you, whom you try your hardest to follow and keep in touch with. In the British Museum that day I said good-bye to the Laura I knew, and there began to exist another Laura who would go on living with Horace and was subject to change from day to day, like myself. Things would happen to her; time would work upon her like yeast, and it would be my business to anticipate these changes, so that when we saw each other again the old and the new would blend and make a complete whole. Otherwise one would be aware of duality in the loved one. The one that was could not be reconciled to the one that is. To love an absent woman a man must be under a considerable mental strain. He must keep that woman always before his eyes as I kept you; but continually alive and in movement, not dead, like a photograph. I have never once looked at your picture all the time I have been away. I didn't wish to memorize the Laura of the past but to keep in touch with the living one. The hours for meals and the hours for sleep were the best for this, for then I could be more or less certain of your movements. Especially at night I like to visualize you, lying on your side, your arms crossed on your breast as you always crossed them in sleep. But even then I made you breathe and toss and sigh and dream."

She bent her head and touched his hand with her lips, then put her arms about his knees and laid her head on them, in a gesture of complete relinquishment, humbling herself before this man who knew so well how to love her.

"If Richard hates me for loving you," she said, in the soft contralto her voice dropped to when she was deeply moved, "then he must hate me. Because not even for him will I give you up."

Horace went out that evening, and she wrote her letter to Richard. She had been undecided at the last whether to write to him or wait until she could see him, but Sendler urged her to write. She could then state her case without fear of interruptions, without fear of breaking down. "One bitter word from him," he said, "and you would collapse." And she knew he was right. She covered pages and pages with her small, rather masculine writing, going back to the very beginning of her marriage and even before her marriage, telling him things she had never told him before.

She recalled the words James had spoken to her on the day of his death. "If the chance ever comes, take it. Walk out, like Norah in 'The Doll's House.'" And at last she was going to walk out. She wished to leave him in no doubt as to her relations with Sendler, and said;

"When a woman loves anyone as I love him she stops at nothing to make that person happy; nothing, that is, that does not involve injury to others. But as soon as we realized there was a risk of losing you and Horatia, my dearest, we parted, for six long years. Any mother would have done the same, I know, and I don't for an instant regret it, but it was hard, and not until you reach my age, and love someone as I love him, will you know how hard. For you see the time is getting short. I don't want to say very much about Arnold. If I tell you that you will like him and that he will be like an elder brother to you, it may prejudice you against him. So I will only say that he is all that a woman like me could possibly wish for in a man, both as friend and lover, and that he has made me incredibly happy. You can guess what a difficult letter this has been to write, and how I have both dreaded telling you and longed to tell you. And oh, my dearest, remember that I am trusting everything to your sympathy and love. You know now what my life has been, what my marriage has been, for I've kept nothing from you, nothing. I don't want you to 'take sides' with or against either your father or me. I only want you to know all the truth and then do as your heart dictates, and if you do that I am convinced that you will deal fairly and justly with us both."

She re-wrote the letter three times, and still it showed corrections and crossings out. She feared the intolerance of the young and inexperienced male, to whom women are sharply divided into two classes, good and bad. But Richard had always shown a tolerably reasoning and logical mind, capable of weighing and analyzing, and she believed she had reason to hope that he would judge her case on its merits, even though she was his mother.

When Stubbs came into the room she saw that Laura's eyes were red, for during her writing of the letter she couldn't keep back her tears. She eyed the envelope with mistrust and dread, and when Laura asked her if she would post it, begged that it should not have to go by her hand.

"If you just wouldn't mind giving it to Mr. Merson, or posting it yourself . . ."

"Promise me you haven't seen anything. You know what I mean. I believe in your second sight. Promise me you don't know anything . . ."

"I've given all that up. I never look now. I promise you I've seen nothing at all. It's only a whim of mine, but I'd rather not touch that letter."

"Well, fetch me my hat and coat, and I'll run out and post it myself. I'd like a little air before I go to bed. I trust my boy. You'll see that I'm right."

Nevertheless she spent two days of agony and two sleepless nights. On the third day she refused to leave her room, and at noon Merson brought her up a telegram. Sick with dread she tore it open and read;

"Don't worry. Recovered from shock and am on your side. Anxious to meet S. Best love. Writing.

"RICHARD."

She uttered a little cry of exquisite relief and rang the bell for Stubbs.

His letter provided further reassurance.

"I admit your news nearly knocked me silly at first, but I've recovered a bit now. And it wasn't only the news itself, but the thought of all the changes that will come with it. Home will be a thing of the past, for of course Stratford Place won't be home without you. But as soon as I leave here I'm going into the works anyway," (Laura had once promised Horace never to try to persuade Richard against going into the business) "and if you live in the country as you say you want to do, perhaps I can stay with you sometimes during the holidays, if Mr. Sendler likes me, and I hope he will. I suppose there's bound to be a divorce and a scandal, and I hate the idea for your sake, though of course it doesn't matter two pins about me.

"I think the less I say about this business of love the better. I know I'm only an infant in these matters, and I don't know what it can do to you, or how important it is, but I expect when I meet Mr. Sendler I shall understand a good deal better than I do now. Anyway, whatever you do is right in my eyes, and I hope you'll be the happiest woman alive."

"Oh, bless him, bless him!" murmured Laura, and immediately afterwards thought, "but isn't he trying hard not to mind, not to let me see that he minds?" And she read the letter again and again, cheered and comforted but not altogether satisfied.

"His mother ran off with a man," she imagined one undergraduate saying to another. "It's in all the papers. Rough luck on him."

"But will it do him harm?" she asked herself. "He is nearly twenty-two. And surely it will soon be forgotten."

The next morning she got up for breakfast—she had lately been breakfasting in her room as her presence at that hour seemed to irritate rather than please Horace—and during the course of the meal asked him whether he would be in or out that evening.

"I'm going to be in, if you've no objection. I'll go out if you prefer it."

"I was hoping you'd be in," she answered quietly (thinking, "soon there'll be no one to speak to me like that"). "There's something I wanted to tell you."

"Can't you tell me now?"

"No, there isn't time. After dinner would suit me better."

"I suppose it's something disagreeable. Have you succeeded in marrying Richard to the tobacconist's daughter, or the local barmaid? You're so pleased with the match you made for Horatia, I thought perhaps . . ."

"On the contrary it's something that you ought to find entirely agreeable. You'll forgive me if I leave you? I have letters to write before I go out."

As she left the room, Horace's thoughts at once turned to another matter.

"If Louie thinks she's going to get that Daimler now she'll soon find she's mistaken." He put down his paper and opened a letter which lay beside his plate, addressed in a flourishing hand with which he was now all too familiar.

"MY DARLING HORRY,

"I went out for a little whirl yesterday in *you can guess what,* and I assure you, it's a love. So quiet and so rich-looking. I shall be the proudest girl in London. Of course I know it isn't the money you will want me to be grateful for, but the kind and loving thought. You did say I might have one this year, you know. You remember you said it that day we went to Newmarket last year, when the old

Singer rattled so like the deuce. I know you haven't forgotten really, though you pretended you had the other day just to tease me.

"I'm expecting you to supper tomorrow night.

"Ever your own loving
"Lady Lou."

Horace used a crude word which he was to use again that day and tore up the letter. If Louie hadn't forgotten to take that young Guardsman's photograph off her dressing-table she might have got her car. It was the first slip she had made during the course of a relationship that had lasted nearly seven years. Only during the last six months had he begun to suspect, now and again, her single-mindedness, to question the absolute sincerity of her devotion. Now he was certain. He was sixty-two; the young Guardsman perhaps twenty-six. And at sixty-two men like Horace keep open such wounds by rubbing into them the salt of their own years, and inflame them with the agony of their lost youth.

In such a mood, and it was heavy upon him, Horace was not a pleasant companion at dinner. During the pauses in their talk Laura rehearsed opening sentences. "Horace, I have something to tell you." Or, "You may be interested to hear, Horace, that I've decided to leave you, for ever." She had been with Sendler all the afternoon. "Suppose he turns me out of the house tonight?" she asked him. "Then pack your things and come straight here with Martha Stubbs. In any case you'll have to leave tomorrow, so you'd better be ready."

She was ready. Stubbs had packed a small trunk for her, and Laura had made up a large parcel of old letters, Lilla's, James's, Olga's, the children's, a pile of notes dealing with

James's "Life" that she would make into a book some day, old photographs, presents, and the books Sendler had given her. There was little enough that she could look on as her own, and she wished to take nothing of Horace's. At dinner she kept looking at Merson. "He will feel it dreadfully," she thought. The other servants were new, or comparatively new, and didn't matter.

"That Denshawai affair is a bad business," said Horace, after a long silence. (There had been an "incident" in the Delta, and an English officer had apparently been murdered.) "I hope they shoot all those villagers. They deserve it, the devils. If Cromer doesn't take a firm stand now . . ."

"If a man were killed in a village here, would we shoot or hang all the villagers?" Laura asked.

"That's quite a different thing and you ought to know it."

"How is it different? Surely justice is justice anywhere."

"Precisely. Then let justice be done, and it is just that those villagers should be executed. Soon no Englishman's life will be safe in Egypt."

"It's curious, that streak of violence in you. You are not exactly a cruel man. It's simply that you cannot imagine pain when it's inflicted sufficiently far away. You were pleased when they lynched all those negroes in Georgia the other day."

"Certainly. They deserved it."

"How do you know they deserved it? There was no trial. Things are changing slowly, very slowly. Primitive man likes direct killing; 'civilized' man likes killing at one remove. Only debased types today like direct killing. That's the only difference."

"You don't know what you're talking about."

As they went upstairs Laura thought, "That's the last time anyone will ever say that to me. For the last time I've sat at table with a man with whom I haven't an idea in common. It's the last time I will ever go up these stairs, have coffee in this room, be mistress in this house." Horace told Merson to light the incandescent lights, as the twilight was beginning to fade and the room to darken a little. As he did so, Laura took her last look at the room she had known for twenty-three years. During that time it had undergone several changes. It was now papered in a design in dull greens and browns meant to suggest tapestry. The woodwork was white, and the floor covered with a large Turkish rug. Silver ornaments shone from the tops of little tables and from cabinets, and photographs mounted in heavy and ornate silver frames stood on mantelpiece, piano and writing-desk: photographs of herself, of the children, of Horace (dressed for an Investiture at the Palace), of his sister Maud in a Court gown, of Olga, her handsome bust well displayed, a laughing picture of Violet, her white woolly dog held up against her face (a picture Laura hated). Books were scattered about, and on the piano, among the photographs, was a large bowl of roses, whose curved petals fell upon a handsome piece of damask. The room was a compromise between what she wanted and what Horace wanted, and she had no sentiment about it whatever. As soon as they were alone, conscious of hands of ice and a thudding heart, she said, "Horace," and then paused.

He looked up from the *Westminster Gazette* and his attitude was fixed and attentive, as though he had heard in her voice a note that was a call to war.

"You may remember I said this morning that there was something I wanted to talk to you about. I think it may as well come now as later." Her eyes widened, and she tightened her lips, and her hands' grasp upon the arms of her chair. "I want you to divorce me, if you will. I want to marry Arnold Sendler. I will gladly give you all the evidence you need."

Without winking or moving, his eyes still fixed on hers, she saw his face turn darkly red.

"What do you mean?"

"I can't put it more plainly, Horace. I want to leave you. I am going to leave you. I am going to live with Arnold Sendler, whom I love. I hope you will divorce me, but I shall live with him whether you do or not."

"Sendler? That German fellow? Then it was true that time? You lied to me?"

"Yes. I had to lie, for the children's sake."

The inevitable word came. He told her his opinion of her in two short syllables, got to his feet and dashed the paper to the floor. Laura remained quietly in her chair, her look unaltered.

"I'm not affected by that, Horace. It doesn't even make me angry. Let us be quite calm about it. I've loved Arnold Sendler for nine years. I had to wait until the children were grown up before I could go to him openly, but now I'm going. I'm forty-four. I've been married to you for nearly twenty-four years, during only five of which you have lived with me as my husband. My love for you is absolutely dead. You killed it years ago. We rarely see each other now and have nothing to say to each other when we meet. It is time I went. I hope you will divorce me. Will you?"

"Divorce you? By God, you've got a fine cheek! Most certainly I shall not. What do you take me for? I married you without a penny to your name, I've kept you in luxury and given you every damned thing you ever asked for, clothes, servants, carriages, money, friends, a title, children—or are those Sendler's—or some other man's?"

"Don't be ridiculous, Horace. I've never been ungrateful for the material things you've given me, but I would gladly have given them up for the things you have not given me. Please believe that once and for all. As for the children, they're old enough now to choose for themselves, to make up their own minds. They're old enough to understand what I am going to do, and why. Richard knows and understands already."

"Does he? Well, I hope he understands this. That if you leave me, and he ever sees you again, I've finished with him, entirely and for ever. Not one penny does he get from me as long as I live or after my death. How dare you make a scandal for me after all I've done for you? How dare you drag the name I've given you into the divorce court?"

"If you had believed me guilty six years ago, wouldn't you have dragged me into the divorce court? Wasn't that what Mrs. Emerson wanted you to do?"

"Did I do it?"

"You were ready to do it. But this leads us nowhere. The truth is that our marriage was a sad mistake. You ought never to have married at all. You would have been much happier unmarried."

"Are you blaming me for that too?"

He stood in front of the fireplace, his hands in his pockets, his face darkly red and his eyes staring. He was in the furious mood in which men who have never laid a finger on any woman in anger are capable of physical violence. She turned a little in her chair, so that she could face him. She was not afraid of him, and she knew she could summon Merson in a moment, but she wanted above everything to avoid a scene, and to keep him as calm as was possible under the circumstances.

"No, Horace, I blame myself for that. I blame my ignorance and optimism. Wouldn't you rather be free of me altogether? Wouldn't a divorce be the best solution? Why do you want to keep me? You don't love me. I don't think you ever loved me."

"You say I never loved you. And why? Because you found fault with me from the very first. Because nothing I ever did pleased you. Because you . . ."

"The same old reproaches," she interrupted, "and so utterly false. I adored you. I worshipped you. Everything you were and did was perfect in my eyes, until you literally forced me to see the truth. You're not a bad man, Horace, don't think I imagine that. You're only a bad husband. In many ways I admire you enormously. But I can't possibly live with you any longer, and I want you to realize that and let me go without bitterness or recriminations. Will you divorce me? I assure you it will be the best thing for all of us."

"No!" he almost shouted. "I'm damned if I will. I'll see you both in hell first."

"Hush, please. The servants will hear."

"Hush? Why should I hush? Let them hear. My name will soon be shouted in the streets by every paperseller, posted up on every placard. A fine return for all I've done for you. What clothes will you go to your lover in? Clothes I've bought and paid for." He began to pace up and down in front of the fireplace. "When you go, you'll leave every shred of reputation behind you. I'll tell your son what you are. Understands, does he? Well, I'll damned well see that he does."

"Horace, I never thought you'd take it like this. Why do you want me to stay? What good am I to you? Merson will run the house. He has run it for years. You'll hardly know the difference. You'll be a free man again, and before you're too old to enjoy your freedom. Never mind the divorce. It doesn't matter. It doesn't make any difference to me whether you divorce me or not. Don't worry about it."

"Worry about it? Oh, no, I won't worry about it. You won't get a divorce out of me if you wait fifty years. Do you understand?"

"Very well. You must do as you please about that. But I can't and won't live here any longer." She got up and moved toward the door. "It's sad that we should have to part like this after so many years." She saw that he was holding to the mantelpiece and that he was shaking with anger. It had never occurred to her that he might have a stroke, but young though he looked she remembered that he was sixty-two and felt frightened. "Horace, please don't take it like this. It had to come. Six months from now you'll be grateful to me for going. I'll ring for Merson to bring you something to drink."

Still holding to the mantelpiece he turned his head and looked at her, a strange look, as of an animal in pain. "You'd better get out," he said, thickly. "Are you sure you're all right?" she asked, half afraid to leave him. "Get out, I say." "Very well. Good-bye." She ran up the stairs, paused on the half landing and listened. Not a sound. She hurried up to her room and rang for Stubbs. "It's over, Stubbs. We're going tonight. But I want you to go down and tell Merson to take some brandy to Sir Horace at once. Tell him he isn't feeling well. I'm rather frightened." Stubbs rushed from the room, and Laura went to her dressing-table and began pulling off her rings.

CHAPTER XV

Laura often thought of Pinero's play, "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray." Paula's tragedy—or one of them—was that the neighbours didn't call. The neighbours didn't call on Laura and Sendler, and very thankful they were.

"Living in sin, you see, has its advantages," Sendler said. The only person who did call was the parson, Mr. Phillips, who, looking very uncomfortable, asked them if what he had heard was true. Questioned as to what he meant, he was forced to be more explicit, and they admitted the truth of his information.

"I wish you could go into politics, my dear sir," advised Sendler, "and get the divorce laws changed. Mrs. Sendler—as I choose that she shall be called—could have divorced her husband five hundred times over had a husband's infidelity been sufficient cause. As it was not, we are driven to living as you find us. Pray do something about it, Mr. Phillips, as it is both unjust and inconvenient. It is true that we are spared invitations to whist drives, bridge parties and church socials, but on the other hand the tradesmen seem to imagine there is some connection between unblessed unions and unpaid bills. Let us say between unpealed bells and unpaid bills. I am not very good at making jokes in English. I could do it better in German."

"When such a serious subject is in question, better not attempt a joke at all, perhaps," said the parson with a little cough as he rose to go. But before offering his hand he said, "May I ask the married name of . . . well, of Mrs. Sendler, as you wish her to be called? Possibly I might do something, write to her husband and endeavour to persuade him . . . to make him see . . ."

"I'm afraid you can't. I've no objection to your knowing, however. He is Sir Horace Leighton, the head of the well-known firm of Leighton and Armytage."

"Ah, really. Dear, dear. What a pity! A man who has done so much for his country, so public-spirited."

"He has done a great deal for himself, and something for his party. What do you suggest he has done for his country?"

"Well, in times of peace . . . the sinews of war . . . a country must be prepared, however much we may hate the necessity . . ."

"When I meet a man of God who hates war," said Sendler, "I may be tempted to change my views on religion. Would you care to come into the garden? I don't think you've seen it since we've been here. It's improving, slowly."

"Thank you, I must hurry away to one of my parishioners, who is ill."

"Was I rude to go upstairs?" Laura asked later. "I wanted to finish that chapter before the Abingers arrive tomorrow."

"Rude? Not at all. You were tactful. It must have been most distasteful for Mr. Phillips to sit in the same room with a scarlet woman. Laura, I sometimes wonder whether a great deal of the prejudice against unmarried couples isn't engendered by the state. By not marrying, we have failed to pay a tax, a license. The state taxes us for keeping bicycles, motor cars, dogs, guns, and so on, and it also taxes us when we take wives. How much of all the prevailing indignation and disapproval is due to the loss of revenue that would be entailed if such practices became universal? What is really a fiscal question is made to seem a moral one. I at least am not deceived by it."

There was a good deal of bitterness at the back of this flippancy, as Laura well knew. That she was still Lady Leighton in the eyes of the law irritated him, and whenever letters came to the house so addressed he would toss them to her and say;

"You perhaps know who this woman is. I do not."

The only dealings she had had with Horace had been through her lawyers, but he showed not the slightest disposition to obtain a divorce and refused to discuss the matter. "If my wife is unhappy, that is entirely her own doing. I did not wish a divorce, neither did I wish her to leave me. That is my last word on the subject."

Laura and Sendler had bought two workmen's cottages on the outskirts of a small Surrey village and had converted them into a single dwelling, a charming little house with low ceilings and doorways, a thatched roof and overhanging eaves. In the summer it was delightful, in the winter somewhat less agreeable, but they spent the two worst months, January and February, in Rapallo each year, going away as soon as the holidays were over, for it was during the holidays that Laura saw most of Richard. They had followed this plan for three years now and it suited them very well. For two years, ever since Rosa's death, Laura had been working on her "Life" of James, and was now nearly ready to bring it out. Sendler had helped her, and as James's reputation had been steadily growing, the Abingers anticipated a wide sale for the book. Sendler was busy with a book of his own, called "The Making of Treaties," a somewhat provocative work, intended, as most of his books were, to arouse controversy. They were busy and happy at Friday Cottage, and old Sir George Humphreys, a great admirer of Sendler, and Laura's devoted friend, had made them a present of a small car in which they drove to the station, or into the country, trundling through the villages at the prescribed rate of ten miles an hour. Laura drove, for Sendler hated machinery and moreover came to a dead stop whenever he saw a child, a nervous horse, or a dog. They had little money, but they minded not at all. Laura worked in the garden a good deal and her skin became darker than ever. In spite of her outdoor life and her activity she put on weight, but this pleased Sendler, who said that a woman approaching her fiftieth year had need of fat.

"My fiftieth year!" thought Laura. "Is it possible that I am really nearing it? Half a century. How strange that I . . . *I* should ever be fifty! I who have always been young, who thought I should always be young. The thing that has happened to other people is happening to me; I can do nothing to prevent it; I will have to face it and accept it with as good grace as I can."

She thought a great deal about time, which seemed to both Sendler and herself the mystery of mysteries. "It's like a wind whose breath is decay," she said once. "It brings decay," he agreed, "but don't forget that it also brings fulfilment." "I sometimes feel," she said on another occasion, hating the speed with which the years were passing, years that had dragged their feet when she was young, "as if I had got by mistake into a train that's running away and heading straight for a precipice. I can't jump off, or if I did it would only hasten the end. I must just wait for the final and inevitable disaster." The symbol of the runaway train had also occurred to him, he said, but at the same time he was learning to regard the whole problem from quite another angle. "I think it's through time that we may look for a sort of immortality. I have an idea in my mind, but it's so vague that it's almost impossible as yet to explain. Roughly, I have an impression that time is static, while matter moves through it, undergoing the changes that matter must undergo, let us say because of the actions of chemicals upon it. I have an impression that all moments are eternal. You and I, here in this garden, are here for ever. Every instant in time—and time is capable of infinite division—is for ever fixed; I can imagine it extending into another and unknown dimension, where we live through it perpetually, all unaware that we have ever lived through it before. Do you think of the past as vanished, as ceasing to exist? I can't. It is out of touch, out of sight, like the future, but I believe it is there, every second of it, and could be perceived by other eyes. Some day I'll have all this clearer in my mind, and then I'll tell you more. At any rate the idea is more pleasing to me than any heaven that could be described by Mr. Phillips, and I can't help thinking, more probable."

Olga, too, had to face middle age. In Laura's opinion she accepted it too willingly. She weighed nearly a stone more than Laura did, and was two inches shorter. She had broad, grey streaks in her black hair, and looked, Sendler said, like a rich Italian Marchesa. She was fascinated by Sendler. She fought that fascination at first, then succumbed to it. He reminded her, she insisted, of Arthur, but Laura knew it wasn't that. Those handsome features, that crisp, greying hair, that well-made, well-balanced body (he ate sparingly, and took very little exercise) had their strong charm for her as they had for Laura, and added to all that was the appeal of an original and active mind and that attraction for women possessed by a man who knows himself, and knows what he wants. In an unwilling way, Olga was in love with Sendler, and although he liked her he had no great opinion of her intelligence. She should have married again; she had wasted herself, it was a great pity. He attributed to her ardent feeling, smouldering desires. Instead of Olga he called her Etna and she enjoyed it. They often went to Pennyfields and sometimes she came to Friday Cottage and occupied the little guest room that was called Richard's room, under the eaves.

There had never been the slightest difficulty in establishing pleasant relations between Sendler and Richard. After their first meeting, Laura had asked, "Well?" and Richard had simply answered, "I like him." He accepted Sendler as an important factor in his life, frankly admired him, and eventually took him into his confidence about a love affair from which he found it necessary and desirable to extricate himself. The lady, in fact, was a harpy, and Sendler knew how to deal with harpies, having come across one or two in his own youth.

Richard resembled his mother more than he did his father. He had Laura's broad face, widely spaced eyes and neat, straight nose, just a trifle inclined to flatness. He was tall and stronger than he looked, but beyond a fondness for cricket showed little interest in games. He was lazy, good-tempered, and both attracted to and attractive to women. His laziness took the form of never walking when he could ride, and never working unless work cried out to be done. The Abingers were so fond of him that they put up with this failing (which they attributed to modern youth) and remembered that he had found for them by good luck or good judgment, but most probably the former, two very successful lady novelists who had turned out to be gold mines. One he charmed away from the publisher with whom she was thinking of throwing in her lot, the other he found at a party in Chelsea, half starved, and discouraged almost to the point of suicide. He read a tattered manuscript that had been pigeon-holed and finally returned by most of the publishers in London and persuaded the Abingers to read it. The results in both cases were highly gratifying.

Horace's name had lately begun to be prominent in the racing news. Having no one but himself to spend his money on he bought race horses, and the name of his stables was mentioned with respect. Snap-shots of him appeared in the illustrated papers, talking, cigar in hand, to his trainer. Laura heard that he had bought a place in Hampshire, but since that night in June three years before she had heard nothing from him. Two or three times a month she went to London to get books from the Library, or to do necessary shopping, or to see the Abingers, and one day as she was crossing St. James's Square in front of the London Library a car swung round the corner and she drew back to let it pass. She saw Horace in it, and he saw her. She saw him lean forward and rap on the glass for the chauffeur to stop, and he then got out, saying, "Wait for me." He came toward her, walking heavily, and she realized, with pain, that he had aged greatly, unexpectedly. His whole body sagged, making his legs seem shorter and his head lower upon his shoulders. There were deeply marked, sagging lines about his grey moustache and under his eyes, and when he took off his hat she saw that his hair was badly in need of cutting. He threw away a newly lighted cigar and said, "Well, Laura?"

"Well, Horace. I'm glad to see you. Are you well?"

"Thank you, fairly well. Would you care to walk about the square with me once or twice?"

"I'd like to." He seemed, after the alertness and aliveness of Sendler, an old man. He told her that the past winter had been a very bad one for him, as he had had a severe bronchial attack and a touch of pleurisy. He still had a cough that sounded ominously in Laura's ears and when he admitted that he had little or no appetite and kept himself going on brandies and sodas she begged him to go away, to Egypt or Algiers. But he assured he couldn't go. He had too many important things on hand; Leighton and Armytage had been reorganized and they were about to issue new shares. He had ten important director's meetings to attend within the next two weeks, and he had just installed a new trainer, as his old one was nearing seventy and wished to retire. As they paced about the square she saw by little signs, by words that he let drop, that he had not been the happier for her going, that she had been, in fact, seldom out of his thoughts. At last he asked her if she were happy.

"Very. Arnold is everything that I could wish for. I adore him, and there is nothing that I would change."

Her reply seemed to disconcert him, to embarrass him. She saw a look come over his face that she had never seen there before; the look of a man who has received an unexpected and dangerous blow of which he must give no sign.

"Then you don't wish a divorce."

"It's too late to talk about that now, Horace. No judge would give you a divorce, after all this time."

"*I* never wanted it. You talk as if I wanted it."

"Well, it has made no difference to me. I intended to live with Arnold whether you divorced me or not, but I think it would have been better for you. You might have married again. I believe you are lonely, in a way."

"I consider myself still married to you, whatever you may have chosen to do. I didn't choose it. However, we had better not talk about that. How is Richard, if I may ask?"

"Richard is splendid. He is very happy with the Abingers. He often comes to spend week-ends with us, in our little cottage, and I believe he really enjoys it."

"If he is doing so well, I presume he has all the money he needs."

"I can't answer for that, Horace. He gets a modest salary, enough to live quite comfortably on. Why don't you see him yourself and ask him? Don't you want to see him?"

"He made his choice. When he preferred his mother to his father, I supposed that he was done with me. I understood that as he hated me he would not wish to take money from me. Surely that's only natural. If a son turns against his father, he cannot wish to continue living on that father's bounty. I gave him everything in the world a father could give a son, he never expressed a wish that I didn't grant, but of course that was all forgotten. When he no longer needed me he pushed me aside."

"But Horace, Richard never turned against you. He never intended to give you up. He was merely determined not to give me up. I was you who forced the choice upon him."

"Oh, of course, it is my fault entirely. It was I who went away with someone else. It was I who left my home and my family and my duties."

The same Horace! But infinitely pathetic now. Stubborn, mistaken, lost, a hopeless egoist, but pathetic.

"Tell me this," he asked, his eyes on the ground, "when did you first fall in love with Sendler?"

She told him. "Then you were never in love with me?"

he said, "never. You took everything from me, but you never loved me. I wonder why you married me?"

She took his arm, and her fingers gripped it so that it must have hurt him.

"Horace, look at me. Raise your head and look at me. Now listen to what I am saying, and let it sink in. Understand it, once and for all. I adored you. When I married you I looked upon you as a god. Never was man more blindly loved, worshipped. I believed that you loved me. I believed our love would last till death parted us, and after. I was ready to give you every atom of myself, of my devotion and loyalty. You were never a good lover. I could have borne that, but what was worse, it was not long before you were a bad husband. I soon ceased to be attractive to you, and you took mistresses. I couldn't help knowing, for you took no great trouble to hide your affairs. First there was Kitty Olleridge, then Mrs. Westchurch, then Mrs. Emerson—there may have been others, but these were the principal ones—then Louie Langton. You utterly neglected me, I wasn't of the slightest interest or importance to you. I was a mere figurehead. I went through agonies, you'll never know what I suffered. For about twelve years I was lonely, bored, humiliated. My love for you died hard, but it died, and by your hand. When it had been dead for so long that I was nearly—but not quite—as indifferent to you as you were to me, Arnold came. You know all this, but you cannot, even to yourself, admit a fault. Your mind works in some curious, devious way of its own, regardless of facts. These are the facts. If you had been certain of my relations with Arnold that time, you would have divorced me, because you were very much in love with Mrs. Emerson, and she wanted to marry you. But you couldn't be faithful even to her, and presently you changed and wanted someone else. You can't hide the truth from me, you can't persuade me that things are as they are not, although you can persuade yourself. I *know*. When I finally went, I think you missed me. I think you were fond of me, without knowing it. I think you are sorry not to have me there now. I think you miss Richard. It's sad, sad for you, because such a little love from you would have kept me. I know you are lonely, and I'm sorry, but after all, you can see Richard whenever you like. Make a sign of reconciliation and he will come to you. And when Horatia and Edward and little Laura come in the summer, you must see them. You must let them know that you've forgiven them. Do, do, do, I beg of you. You may not live for ever, my dear."

They were near the car. He stopped in his walk, and without looking at her said, "It's always the same. All the fault is mine. Well, good-bye, good-bye." He stepped into the car, beside a young chauffeur whose face was strange to her, and said, "Back to Grange Park. I won't stop at the Club." The car turned into Pall Mall and was lost to sight. Laura went to the railings of the Square and looked at the tulips without seeing them. She felt weak and shaken by the encounter, and saddened. She wished she had not attempted the impossible, but had let truth go by the board and tried to comfort that unhappy man a little. Such egoism was akin to madness and should be treated as such. Poor Horace! With that cough he oughtn't to be driving in an open car. She wished she had asked him to shut it. It was a cold spring, exactly the sort of weather to bring on a return of his bronchitis. Uneasy and not at all well satisfied with herself, she left the railings and crossed the Square to enter the library. When she had done her errand there, she went in search of a hat, purchasing one that she could wear all through the summer, a thing shaped somewhat like a waste-paper basket, made of straw and trimmed with flowers. She looked very young in it, hardly more than thirty-five, but the buying of it gave her no pleasure that day. Sendler was to join her later, and they were going to see "The Arcadians," and spend the night in town with the Abingers. (They came to London, either for a concert or a musical comedy—Sendler still had a contempt for the English play of the time—about once a month.) Laura told Sendler she wished she had not seen Horace; the sight of him had depressed her and made her unhappy, and she knew that the evening was spoilt for her.

It was the year when the Wright brothers were much talked about, when Captain J. W. Dunne flew the first aëroplane over English soil; when the decline in the French birthrate was giving rise to great anxiety, (and in some quarters, the French suspected, to satisfaction); when Elinor Glyn was the most talked-of woman writer, and Robert Hichens was selling like hot cakes; it was the year King Edward won his third Derby, with Minoru; when Pavlova was much admired in Paris but had not yet come to London, when Max Dearly invented the "Apache," and the suffragettes grew in numbers, strength and audacity. And that summer Horatia, a stout, happy, placid young mother, came to visit England with her husband and her little two-year-old daughter.

She spoke, already, like an American born. She had adopted her new country with thoroughness and enthusiasm. She might have been a Native Daughter of the Golden State. She marvelled that anyone could live in England, and implored Richard to come out to God's country, by which she meant that strip by the Pacific Ocean where she had found happiness. Edward seemed pleased to be in

England again and delighted to find his sister occupying a cottage not half a mile from Laura's, where she was looked after and companioned by a niece from Gloucestershire, and saw her old friend and mistress almost daily. Horatia, Edward and the baby spent two weeks at Stratford Place and two weeks at Grange Park (a gloomy place with fine stables), Horatia having written her father a conciliatory letter. She reported that he was a willing if eccentric host, that he drank a prodigious number of brandies and sodas, and relied upon Merson for everything.

"I wouldn't give two pins for a country place in England," Horatia said. "Edward's going to buy me a ranch next year, I hope. That's what I want. Then you and Mr. Sendler must come out and visit us, mother."

She was prejudiced against Sendler at first, and Laura was afraid she might refuse to meet him, but she overcame her reluctance and his tact and magnetism won her over. She thought it dreadful that they couldn't marry, but she quite understood her mother's actions, and was generous enough to say that had she and Edward been placed in a like situation, she would have done the same.

Laura's book appeared in the autumn of that year and was very favourably reviewed. She got a sad pleasure from the writing of it; it was a return to her youth and seemed to evoke the very presence of her brother. She told Sendler that at times she was aware of James's criticism, and seemed to hear his comments. The only person whom the book displeased was Violet, who was annoyed by the small part she played in it. She wanted Laura to publish two photographs of her, one taken at sixteen and one taken within the last two months by Lallie Charles. Instead Laura published a youthful pencil sketch James had once made of her, in which her long, rippling hair, her thin legs and great eyes were happily hit off. She included no pictures of herself and only one of James (an excellent photograph of his head in profile), and one of Lilla. She received a basketful of letters from his admirers, and for a long time was busy answering them, a task she much enjoyed.

Sendler and she did an enormous amount of reading, and when Horatia went back to America she had instructions from Laura to send her both the San Francisco and the New York papers. The English papers had very little American news in them beyond murders and accidents and occasional statistics of no interest. She saw one day a column in which English readers were informed that in New York the police arrested someone every three minutes, buried someone every seven minutes, a fire broke out every forty-eight minutes, an accidental death occurred every one and three quarter hours, there was a suicide every eight hours, three divorces per day, a marriage every thirteen minutes, a baby every three, and a bankruptcy every seven hours. "The Jungle," telling of the horrors of the stockyards, was one of the few American novels that had penetrated to any great extent into the libraries and book shops, and it was not surprising that the majority of English people regarded America as a highly unpleasant country to live in.

Little Laura, a delightful child of two, had had a marked success with Horace, who started a banking account in her name and exhibited every symptom of pride in his first grandchild. He corresponded fairly regularly with Horatia after her return, and such news as Laura had of him came to her via San Francisco.

In February of 1912, while she and Sendler were in Rapallo, a telegram came from Merson, which had been forwarded from Surrey, to the effect that Sir Horace was dangerously ill with bronchitis and pleurisy. They hastened their departure by a few days and returned to England, Sendler going to his club and Laura to the Abingers. The news from Stratford Place was grave. There had been a consultation, and Horace, unless he took a rapid turn for the better, was not expected to live more than twenty-four hours. Laura went to the house and talked to the doctor and to Merson, who was very much affected at seeing her again. She asked if she might see the patient, and the doctor thought it best that she should do so. It might have a good effect on him, and certainly could do no harm. Horace's nurse met her at his door and prepared him for her coming. "He wants very much to see you," she said, "in fact he has been asking for you all day." Laura went into the room, where nothing seemed changed, and approached the bed. Horace's eyes met hers at once, as if he had been watching the door, and she leaned over him and put a cool hand on his forehead. He was fighting for his breath and had great difficulty in speaking. She smoothed his forehead and said, "Don't try to talk, dear. It's all right." He managed to say, "Get your things and stay here until . . ." She nodded. "I'll send for my things and stay here until you're better. I've come all the way from Rapallo. Merson sent me a telegram. I'm so glad he did." Horace nodded. "I'm done for," he whispered. "No, no. You're going to get well. I know you are." "Done for," he repeated. She stood quietly beside the bed, looking out of the window at the houses opposite, and winking away her tears. "Don't you want to see Richard?" she asked. "He won't want to see me." He began coughing, and the nurse came to his assistance. When the fit was past he said in a weak whisper, "He hates me." "No, my dear, no. He doesn't hate you. He wants to see you. He'll come whenever you like. Now, at once, if you wish." "Let him come, then. I did everything I could for him, but he hates me." "Hush, dear, hush!" She bent down and kissed his forehead. "I'm going to telephone to him." He indicated the nurse. "Let her do it. You stay here." When the nurse left the room Laura drew a chair close to the bed and sat beside him, holding one of his hands. He turned his head toward her and said, in his difficult whisper, "It wasn't I who sent you away." She pressed his hand. "Hush, hush, you know all that. Let's not talk about it." He fell silent, lying with closed eyes, and the only sounds in the room were the fluttering of the coal fire and his painful breathing.

Richard arrived within half an hour and Laura met him outside the door. They had not seen each other for two months, and he took her in his arms and kissed her affectionately. "I'm afraid he's not going to live, darling," she whispered to him. "Be very kind to him. I think, in his way, he regrets everything."

She left the two together, and presently Richard came out of the room looking white and unhappy.

"It's no good. I did my best. I can't make him understand that I don't hate him. He says we were all against him." There were tears in his eyes. "What had I better do? Wait here?"

She spoke to the nurse, who seemed to think Horace would live until the next day, so Richard went back to the office and promised to return about ten that evening. Laura sent for her suit-case and prepared to spend the night there, occupying her old room which was almost as she had left it. Horace sank into unconsciousness, and when the doctor returned things looked hopeless. He failed to recognize Richard the second time, but seemed easier and quieter when Laura was there holding his hand than when she was not. Richard insisted on staying until the end and his own bedroom was made ready for him. It was his first experience with death and he took it very hard, all the colour leaving his face and his eyes looking strained and tragic. This sudden breaking up seemed to him very terrible. He had grown accustomed to thinking of his father as invulnerable, impervious; he had always been so busy with his Company, with his directorships, with his shooting, his race-going and latterly his horses; with gay and attractive ladies, with dinner parties and suppers; and now he was utterly undone and broken and defeated, struggling for breath and clinging to Laura's hand. Once during the night they heard him mutter, "I've told your father that I'd advance him the money, but of course I don't expect to see a penny of it again."

At six o'clock in the morning he died, without regaining consciousness.

CHAPTER XVI

King Edward died in 1910, after a too-short reign of nine years. He still further popularized constitutional monarchy and contributed something of his own to the romantic and important symbolism of kingship, like a grown-up playing a childish game and outdoing the children themselves in imaginative genius.

He was Sendler's idea of what a modern ruler should be, and he watched his every move with extreme interest. In fact it was shortly before the king's fatal illness that he first thought of becoming a British subject. He and Laura often talked of it in a half serious way, and had she urged him to take any steps he would have done so. But she preferred not to urge him, feeling it was a private and personal matter and preferring that he should come to it in his own way and in his own time.

The years between 1906 and 1914 were the happiest of Laura's (and of many another's) life. Europe was enjoying an era of comparative peace, broken only by Italy's war with Turkey, and a war, intermittently carried on between Turkey on the one hand and Bulgaria and Servia on the other; but trouble in the Balkans was looked upon as a necessary condition of existence in those turbulent countries and no one bothered very much. In 1910 Dr. Crippen had the distinction of being the first criminal to be arrested by wireless; in 1911 China overthrew the dynasty and became a republic; in 1912 Captain Scott reached the South Pole and died there, creating another epic of the snows, and the Titanic sank (with two of the directors of Leighton and Armytage on board), a monstrous tragedy of the seas. It was the year the first Aerial Derby took place, the year the suffragettes succeeded in becoming the chief topic of conversation and a menace to the peace of politicians, that Dr. Wilson was elected president of the United States. In 1913, all unconscious of their fate the little victims of the world war played, worked, made love, and fought their little battles. The Irish Home Rule Bill passed its third reading in the House of Commons only to be rejected in the Lords, the Balkan War broke out afresh, strikes became more frequent, Gustav Hamel flew across the Channel and back without once alighting, the first vessel passed through the Panama Canal, the name of Lloyd George the Welsh Wizard was on every Englishman's lips (frequently accompanied by a curse) and Germany scornfully rejected Winston Churchill's suggestion of a year's naval holiday.

Horatia, now the mother of three daughters, was unable to fulfil her promise of a yearly visit to England, and came, in fact, only once in three years, to Laura's great disappointment. She had thoroughly identified herself with the life of San Francisco, and she and Edward (now one of the most prominent of that city's citizens, in spite of the fact that he wasn't a native son), had built themselves a fine new house on Jackson Street and had bought a ranch about twenty miles from Palo Alto which was the joy of Horatia's life. Here she rode and taught her children to ride, ran a model dairy and a chicken farm on the grand scale. She and Edward were as contented a pair as could have been found between Atlantic and Pacific, and worried about nothing.

Richard, too, was happy. Horace, curiously conventional in all outward things, had divided his fortune between his two children ("my wife having deserted me"), instead of leaving it elsewhere, as it had seemed likely enough, at one time, that he might do. Richard was therefore a very rich young man, and having no definite talents, little ambition and not the slightest interest in politics, seemed quite content to enjoy all that the possession of wealth, youth, good looks and good health brought him. Out of deference to his mother's prejudices he sold his interests in Leighton and Armytage and invested the capital elsewhere. He became a director of and put a considerable sum of money into the firm of Abinger and Company, enabling the brothers to publish "de luxe" editions of rare books, which it had long been their ambition to do, but he was rarely present at their business meetings. He was affectionate and generous and made Laura handsome presents, for she refused at this time to benefit by Horace's money in any other way. In fact Richard lived the life of an agreeable and not at all heartless young man of fashion, and frequented the Mott's, the Cremorne Rooms and the Café Riche of his day. He frequently assured his mother that he would soon become bored with this life and "take up something serious," but the moment for doing so was postponed from year to year. He gave week-end parties at Grange Park, the place his father had left to him in Hampshire, but got rid of the stables, as he cared nothing at all for racing. It was difficult indeed to know what Richard did care for, certainly not, Laura was obliged to admit, for the things of the mind. And yet there came from him sometimes flashes of insight, of knowledge, that were highly encouraging. "If only he marries an intelligent woman with strength of character," Laura said, "he may be anything."

Sendler often tried to reassure her about her son. He would settle down, he said, when the time came, if that was what she wanted; that escapade in a gambling club in Mayfair in which his name unfortunately appeared in the papers, did him no discredit. It was natural for rich young men to gamble now and then and he would soon tire of it.

"I myself used to gamble in Munich," Sendler said. "With small sums, to be sure, as I couldn't command large ones, but now, if someone showed me an absolutely infallible system and gave me a ticket for Monte Carlo, I wouldn't go. The forming, hardening process is very slow in some men. It was slow with me and I can see that it will be slow with Richard. This money may even delay it, but by the time he is forty you will see a fine man."

"If one could only be sure," she said, "that he isn't hardening and forming in the wrong way."

"Listen. I know that boy very well, better, I sometimes think, than you do. A weak boy would never have stood by you as he did, and risked losing a fortune. By the time he is forty you will see a fine ripe rounded character, like myself."

This made Laura laugh.

"I'd think you a finer, riper, rounder character if you'd make up your mind once and for all what you're going to do about your nationality. At the moment I'm a German woman who may or may not be British in the future, according to the whim of another person."

"Well, it isn't a whim at all. I'm waiting."

"May I ask for what?"

"Certainly. For the new British Nationality and Status of Aliens Act, if you wish to know. They are about to pass an Act of Parliament, as you would know if you read the papers as an intelligent woman should, and I want to see first what new things are going to be embodied in it."

"It takes two people to read a paper. I'm always pointing things out to you that you ought to have seen. How much does it cost to be naturalized?"

"I can enjoy all the privileges of a British subject for the modest sum of ten pounds," he replied. "One pound in advance and nine subsequently. I do not consider it excessive."

"I'll even make you a present of the ten pounds, as a slight encouragement."

"I gather you definitely want me to be British. Do you? Yes or no?"

"I don't want you to do it to please me."

"Why not? In a sense, you became German to please me, when we married."

"Very well then, yes, I would like it, unless you feel you're giving up something that's precious to you."

Sendler answered,

"It was actually a Frenchman, I believe, who gave utterance to the words, 'Only one sky, why then so many countries?' I don't intend to return to Germany to live; I live in England and am married to an English woman. Why not live here as a British subject? I don't believe that nationalities are of prime importance to the progress of the human race—quite the contrary indeed. Strong national feeling is a modern growth, after all, and while among the masses it is probably increasing, among intelligent men it is growing weaker. In fact the higher up you go in the scale of intellect, the less national prejudice you find. Why then, should I remain a German when it is more convenient not to do so?"

"Precisely," agreed Laura.

"Then I'll send in my papers, or make application, whatever the rigmarole is, at once."

"Good. It will be a happy way of celebrating the day."

"Why? What day is it?"

"The eighth anniversary of the day on which I left Horace's roof."

"I didn't know it. What would you like me to do about it, in addition to changing my nationality?"

"Say something appropriate."

He looked at Laura's face, which had become like the mirror of his own, in that he seemed to see his own emotions, moods, thoughts reflected in it. A brown face, without much colour nowadays except for the blue eyes made bluer by the greying hair. A handsome woman still, firm of body and now in excellent health in spite of an operation two years ago that had caused him terrible anxiety.

"Very well. I consider you the most fortunate woman of my acquaintance in having had the inestimable privilege of spending eight years with me, and I felicitate you with all my heart."

"You blessed fool," she remarked, going to him for a kiss, "it seems to me I like you better every day."

It was not, however, until June, 1914, that Sendler, dilatory in some matters, actually made application to the Home Secretary for naturalization. And that same month the Archduke Francis Ferdinand and his wife were assassinated at Sarajevo.

Archdukes, princes, even kings had been assassinated before, a good many of them within her memory, Laura pointed out when Sendler looked grave, and was far more upset about Ulster's determination to resist Home Rule, and over the death of Joe Chamberlain. She was even more upset over the sudden appearance of Richard in his car one Sunday, just before lunch, accompanied by a very striking young woman. After lunch, at the first opportunity, he took Laura aside and told her, not without visible signs of emotion, that he was engaged to be married to "Ernestine."

Laura, startled and hurt, instantly realized that she was in danger of taking it less well than she had always hoped she would.

"Couldn't you have told me just a little sooner, or prepared me? I never heard of her. I don't even know her name."

"Van Vries. Ernestine Van Vries. It was only decided last week. I've been in love with her for months. She's lovely, isn't she? Don't you think she's beautiful?"

"She's decidedly good-looking, but is that particularly important? Tell me more about her." She said to herself, "I must be careful what I say. I'm beginning already to show my claws, the claws of the mother cat. I've always vowed I wouldn't."

"Her father is Peter Van Vries," Richard went on, too excited and elated to be aware of undertones in her "the South African millionaire—diamonds, of course. She's been entirely educated in England. She was sent here when she was six. Her mother's dead and she's the only child. She could have married anybody. You must have seen her picture in the *Sketch* and the *Tatler* no end of times. She was presented two years ago by Lady Somercliffe, in fact I met her at her house. You will like her, won't you mother? She said just now that you were one of the most attractive women of your age she'd ever met, and I can see she's charmed with Arnold. Please say you'll like her, mother. I'm terribly in love with her."

"Oh, my darling, are you sure?"

"I haven't thought of anyone else since I met her. I never will again."

"My dearest boy, if you love her of course I shall like her. Shall I ever forget how you stood by me when I needed you so? Only it's a shock, I wasn't in the least prepared for it. Oh, my darling, I won't lose you, will I?"

They kissed each other, out of sight of the other two, and he patted her back and said, "Lose me? I should think not. You'll have another daughter. Thank you for taking it so well. I've been terribly worried—there was another man she thought of marrying—and now that it's all right I hardly know where I am. I can't believe my good fortune. I don't think she's as much in love with me as I am with her, not yet, anyway, and I've had some sleepless nights." His voice trembled with his excitement and emotion.

She pressed his arm. "Never mind. It's all right now. Shall I say anything to her today?"

"Not today, if you don't mind. She's a bit on edge too. I wanted you to know, that's all. Write to her, if you will. I think that would be best. I'll give you her address. We haven't told anyone yet."

Laura had never seen her son so nervous, so uncertain of himself. Sendler and the tall, slim girl were walking in another part of the garden. She was very beautifully dressed in white silk with white shoes and stockings and a great black straw hat trimmed with gardenias. Her skin was wax-like and pale, her features coldly regular, her eyes large and dark, with thick lashes. She had a mole at the corner of her upper lip and one under her right eye, as happily placed as though put there with her own hands. Her mouth was colourless and finely cut, but too thin, Laura thought, and passionless. She seldom smiled and her eyes had an ironic and faintly bored expression. Her mode of addressing Richard was ironic and indifferent, and Laura told herself that she could as easily warm to a block of ice. She was very polite to both Laura and Sendler and thought the place "quite delightful." They had lately bought a barn a hundred yards from the house and turned it into a music room and this she praised almost with enthusiasm. "We must do over one of the rooms in Grange Park like this," she said to Richard, and Sendler looked with raised eyebrows first at one and then at the other of them. "Oh," Miss Van Vries said, "I suppose you don't know. Dick and I are thinking of marrying in the near future. I loathe a fuss, so we aren't telling anyone until our plans are made. Please don't congratulate us. It's quite possible that nothing at all will come of it."

"Richard told me just now," said Laura, forcing her eyes and mouth into a smile, "and I need hardly say that I hope very much something will come of it."

"Do you?" the girl said, regarding her with cool surprise, "I can't think why, but it's kind of you to say so." She glanced at her wrist-watch. "Come along, Dick. It's time I was getting back. I intended to start earlier, really." She shook hands with Laura and Sendler and said to the latter, "I must talk to you again about South Africa. You think far too well of the Boers. If it hadn't been for the English we'd still have been a lot of Bible-thumping barbarians. I hate the Boers. My mother was English, of course. She went out to the Cape on a visit and met my father and married him without telling her parents. I wish she'd stayed at home."

"I don't," said Sendler, bowing over her hand.

When the car had gone off down the quiet lane with a diminishing roar, Laura turned to Sendler and burst into tears.

"Don't cry, my angel," he said, putting his arm about her and drawing her toward the house, "I don't believe a son of yours will be ass enough to marry her."

"He will, he will," Laura sobbed. "He's wild about her, mad about her. And she'll be the ruination of him. Can't anything be done to stop it? I can't bear it, I can't bear it!"

"We'll try, we'll try. If he wanted to marry a South African why didn't he choose a robust, round-cheeked, single-minded, tennis-playing damsel? There are plenty of them, and any one of them would make a better wife for him than this exotic."

But they married, with great suddenness, ten days before war was declared and went for their honeymoon to Biarritz.

The day after the wedding, Violet, who had come from Sydenham to attend it, returned with Laura and Sendler to Friday Cottage for a short visit. She was plump, with the kind of roundness, Sendler said, that suggested she had been boned. She was too youthfully dressed and now bleached her faded hair a lively yellow. The nearing threat of war did nothing to subdue her silly gaiety. "Who were you with tonight, tonight, Oh, who were you with tonight?" she sang, holding up a rogueish forefinger. It was her favourite song, and every time she sang the first bars of it—which was all too often—she went into peals of tinkling laughter. Her incurable archness had grown upon her. Mr. Sprigge had gone to Manchester for a few days on business, and, "I'll sing it to him when he comes home," she said, "naughty old man. I tell him I'll get another boy if he doesn't take care, going off and leaving his little wifey like this. 'I don't look a day over forty,' I said to him, 'so you be careful.' 'Forty?' he said, 'shame,' he said, 'you look a succulent thirty-five.' That's the way he talks to me, after all these years, too. 'Oh, who were you with tonight, tonight, Oh, who were you with tonight?' I just love that song."

"Send her away, for God's sake," cried Sendler, when he and Laura were alone together. "Doesn't she know what's happening? Send her away, or there'll be a succulent corpse in her bed one night. Get rid of her, Laura, I mean it. Tell her I'm ill."

Laura got rid of her, and as she sat in the car which was to take her to the station she wagged her forefinger at them and sang, "Oh, who were you with tonight, tonight, Oh, who were you with tonight?"

"God!" cried Sendler, pacing the floor of the sitting-room, "there's going to be war, war, and you and I are enemy aliens. Do you realize that? Enemy aliens. It has a pleasant ring, hasn't it? Why in Christ's name didn't I send in my papers earlier? Oh, fool, fool! Procrastinator, criminal fool!"

The hot summer days that followed seemed threatening; the sky was blue steel, the sun a shield of brass. Like a mysterious subterranean flood the threat of war rose higher higher, by what agency no man could precisely say. Sendler went up to London to see what he could learn and came back with that dark, bruised look under the eyes that Laura knew so well.

"It's coming, it's coming. Nothing can stop it now."

"But Archdukes have been murdered before."

"Never so opportunely. I know the very men in Germany who are saying, 'Let the excuse serve. It might as well be now as later.' A great army, tired of nothing but manœuvres, a great navy, quite untested, some fire-eaters in high places and the threat of Russia to arouse the masses. I can see exactly how it will come."

"They'll come to their senses before it's too late. They must. Surely we've got beyond that sort of thing. It's mad, nightmarish. I thought the countries had agreed to arbitrate. Is everyone crazy?"

"They've gone too far. They can't draw back. Think, Laura, a handful of men here and there, ageing, liverish, unimportant, unintelligent jacks-in-office are about to jockey the world into the greatest blood-bath in history. It's the time for all sane men, all lovers of peace, to go and hang themselves."

"If I had my choice," Laura thought, "and if it weren't for him and for Richard, I'd much rather die than live through it." She stood looking with sad eyes upon the garden, darkening in the dusk. Her thoughts came disconnectedly, treading on one another's heels. "A world war. It seems impossible, impossible. I can't realize it. Richard may have to fight, and if he has to fight he may be killed. My only son. They may send Arnold and me to Germany. What *will* they do with us? Everything will be changed. Horrible! No more peace. Peace! Does anything else matter? Why do countries want war? What do they hope to gain by going to war now? The Boer war was nothing compared to this. Germany and France at each other's throats. 1870 over again, only infinitely worse. I can just remember that. I was eight years old. There seems to be no progress at all. One loves to imagine that people are growing wiser, saner. They're not. If we live very quietly here perhaps they won't bother us, or bother about us. But perhaps we'll keep out of it. We haven't declared war yet. And if we do, perhaps they'll give Arnold his papers in spite of it. Surely they won't trouble about him when they know how British his sympathies are. It's true that technically he's a German, and so am I. Well, I'm quite willing to be what he is. Perhaps if the worst does come, it will soon be over. War will be so terrible today no one could stand it for very long. I suppose it's been coming, coming for years. All those friendly visits of the Kaiser's. They didn't mean anything at all. He hates us. Queen Victoria was never really fond of him. Perhaps she guessed. But possibly this isn't actually his fault, or entirely his fault. Arnold thinks it isn't. Horace would have been in his element. He always hated the Germans. Thank heaven I've no connection with Leighton and Armytage now. Mrs. Bingle's son is in the regular army. He'll be called up at once if there's war, poor woman. But perhaps we're torturing ourselves for nothing. I must comfort Arnold, I've never seen him so depressed."

Sendler saw in the war a perilous step backward, a colossal folly, a terrifying menace to such civilization as man had managed to establish, precariously enough, in a disorderly world. In addition to this, he was in a particularly difficult and awkward position, and knew it. He heard nothing whatever from the Home Office—which had its share of troubles—for three months, during which time history was busy writing itself in men's blood. He was then informed that the question of naturalization would have to wait until the cessation of hostilities. The parson's wife said to the doctor's wife, "It seems just a little odd that he happened to send in his papers when he did. It looks as though he knew quite well what was coming and did it to allay suspicion." A third woman reported the conversation to Laura. Neither she nor Sendler were precisely popular in the village, which remembered the days when they lived "in sin," and at the same time resented the fact that they took little or no part in the communal life. "It's country life, not village life, that we came here for," Laura sometimes said. Soon after Christmas, Sendler, infuriated by the whisperings and cold stares his presence caused in the village, exclaimed, "We'd better go to London to live. There people mind their own business. I can't stand much more of this." Laura agreed and not long afterwards they installed the gardener and his wife in the cottage, and took a small furnished house in Elizabeth Street, not far from Victoria Station. Richard and his bride were long since back in Whitehall Court. They had been about to buy a house, but Richard had thought it wiser to wait a little. "If I join up," he said, "it will be better for you to live here than alone in a house."

Ernestine looked at him out of her eyes that were like hard coals and said, tapping the end of a cigarette against a gold box, "You'll wait until you're wanted, my boy. If you go before you may not find me here when you return."

They had everything they wanted except a peaceful world in which to enjoy it, and this Ernestine fiercely resented. London had gone dance mad that year, and they belonged to every night club patronized by "smart" people. Laura could see that Richard was terribly afraid of the icy, beautiful girl he had married, afraid, and terribly in love. He hung about her nervously, tried to anticipate her wishes, and when he failed, implored her forgiveness. They danced perfectly together and were much admired. She had only one passion; to be seen everywhere, and exquisitely dressed. Pale, cold, apparently indifferent, but eternally watchful of the effect she made, she was like a chill, vigilant spectre at the feast of her own beauty.

Laura had begun by dreading with a sick and fearful dread the moment when Richard would go to the war. She presently began to fear that he did not mean to go. As the casualty lists lengthened, as the long tragedy deepened and the prospects of an early peace grew fainter and fainter, Richard continued to dance with his lovely, thin-lipped wife and Laura's spirits sank lower and lower.

"You said you knew him," she said to Sendler. "Did you think he would let poor men, fathers of children, fight for him while he stayed at home and danced?"

"I didn't know then that he would marry this woman."

"Arnold, you know how I adore him. Well I'd rather see him in danger, though it would nearly kill me, than living so heartlessly."

"He's not heartless. He's unhappy, I can see it. She won't let him go. He's afraid of her, but he'll break away soon, I know he will."

Sendler offered his services to the government in any capacity whatsoever but was coldly rejected on the grounds of his nationality. "It is my nationality," he retorted, "that would at least have made me useful as an interpreter." "You'd better lie low, my dear fellow," his friends advised. "We know you're all right, but if you try to get a job in any government office you'll only lay yourself open to suspicion."

Laura went daily to a Red Cross depot, although that winter for the first time she suffered much from rheumatism. Her hands were badly swollen and she worked with difficulty. Sendler's income from Germany had ceased, and if it had not been for his royalties and the money Richard insisted on his mother accepting, they would have been badly off. It soon got about among the tradespeople that Sendler was a German, and the newsboy shouted "Hun!" in at the door one evening as he delivered the paper; but not until the Zeppelin raids began were they seriously troubled by persecutors. One night stones were thrown at their windows, and the dining-room window was shattered by a piece of brick wrapped in brown paper on which were written the words, "Get out, you damned spy!" Lord Haldane, great man, philosopher and scientist also had his windows broken because he was reported to have said that Germany was his spiritual home. This was the work of roughs and fools, and Sendler knew very well that the mass of the people were against such demonstrations. He reproached himself bitterly for having waited so long before naturalizing himself. He was obliged to report to the police with boring frequency and was conscious of being watched. There was another raid and bombs were dropped in the immediate neighborhood. The next day demonstrations began again, and this time the demonstrators were less easily dispersed by the police.

"This is hell for you," said Sendler. "I had better go away."

"Do you think I'd let you go without me, my darling?"

"What shall we do, then?"

"I don't know. But we'll keep together whatever happens."

Laura knew that she was whispered about a good deal at the Red Cross depot, and some of the ladies, she was aware, objected to her presence because she was married to a German and because she had a son who had not gone to the war, as their sons had. But in spite of the extra suffering this brought her she bore it calmly and said nothing to Sendler. She had aged a good deal and had grown thinner, but her blue eyes could still light up with their old flash and fire, and now and again with humour, though there was little enough to laugh about at that time. She found it impossible to become inured to the fact of war itself, to the colossal casualty lists, to the ever-present thought of death, violent death; and in addition to that she suffered because of Richard, who followed his wife about like a nervous, abject slave, and because of the cruelty of Sendler's position. Olga often came to the house in Elizabeth Street in those days, a very welcome visitor. Alone at Pennyfields, in a part of Essex that was very frequently bombed, she was far from happy. She had closed the house therefore and was now staying at a London hotel. She was thinking, at fifty-two, of marrying a general at the War Office, and asked Sendler's advice.

"My dear Olga, better late than never, of course. Certainly marry him, and soon, before a fit of apoplexy robs you of him for ever."

She answered, a little indignantly, "He's not at all the apoplectic sort. He's rather thin and tall. I suppose you'd think him a little bit stupid, but he's very kind and comes of a good Lincolnshire family."

Sendler liked teasing Olga, and her literal-mindedness amused him. "Ah, well, if it's a Lincolnshire family, of course, don't hesitate. Had it been Suffolk or perhaps Norfolk. . . ."

"I can't feel that Arthur would mind, can you, Laura?"

"Marry him, marry him," advised Sendler. "Men will be at a premium soon, and at all events you'll be avoiding a lonely old age. It's both fortunate and surprising that you're not in love with some beardless boy of twenty."

"I've been spared that, thank heaven!" she said.

One night while all three were at dinner a policeman came to the house. Their young maid announced, with a frightened face, that someone wished to see Mr. Sendler in the hall.

"Who is it?" Sendler asked, about to drink his coffee.

"It's someone from the police station, sir," the girl replied in a loud whisper.

"Ask him to come in here."

A moment later a tall policeman entered, his face red with a kind of embarrassment. He made the little dining-room seem yet smaller. "Are you Mr. Arnold Sendler?" he asked.

"I am."

"I'm sorry, sir, but I've orders to take you along to the police station. We've been instructed to round up all enemy aliens now. They half killed an Austrian in Westminster the other night, after a raid. Said he'd been signalling to the Zepps. If you'll fetch your things and come along with me it will be best for you in the long run."

"What do you want to do? Intern me?"

"A lot of foreign gentlemen are asking to be interned, sir. It's safer."

Laura stood up, with a very white face. "Intern him? Where?"

"That's for him to say, ma'am. He can take his choice, though if you'll listen to my advice, sir, you'll choose the camp in Yorkshire. There's a better crowd up there than what there is at the Alexandra Palace, and not so many."

"I shall go too, constable," Laura said.

"I'm sorry, ma'am, but we don't intern women."

"Must I go?" Sendler asked. "I'm not afraid of rioters."

"Those are my orders, sir."

"Well, it's a shame!" burst out Olga. "It's an outrage. Mr. Sendler is as loyal as the Prime Minister himself. It oughtn't to be allowed. If I'd known this was likely to happen I'd have told my friend General Ogden-Shaw at the War Office. I'm sure he could prevent it and would prevent it if he knew. Put it off for a day or two and it will be all right. I'm sure it will."

"Sorry, ma'am, but my orders are to take Mr. Sendler along tonight. If you haven't finished your supper, ma'am," he said, addressing Laura, "I'll just wait in the hall a bit. No need to rush things."

"That's all right, we've finished," said Sendler, looking at Laura.

"Are you perfectly sure I can't go with him, constable?" she asked.

"Quite sure, ma'am."

"Come upstairs, dearest," she said, steadily. "We must see what things you had better take with you."

"Arnold, you're not going!" cried Olga. "I'm sure you needn't go. I'm going to ring up General Ogden-Shaw at his house now."

"No, Olga, please don't," said Sendler. "It won't be the slightest use, thank you all the same." As he and Laura left the room they heard Olga say,

"It's a shame. You're letting all the spies escape and interning honest, loyal people like Mr. Sendler just because they're easy to get at."

The constable, who thought it better to ignore her, made no reply but went out into the hall where he stood looking up at nothing at all; obviously a man who had been sorely tried on many another occasion. Olga remained in the dining-room, wondering what strings there were she could possibly pull in case General Ogden-Shaw could do nothing.

"I knew this would come," said Sendler when they were upstairs in their bedroom. He took Laura into his arms, and for a long time they clung together, mutely, neither able to think of a single word of comfort. At last he said,

"You won't be troubled any more, thank goodness. No more windows broken."

"Oh, my darling, my darling, what shall I do without you?"

"It's all my fault. I was a fool."

"No, mine too. I just left it. I ought to have made you do it."

"I'll go to Alexandra Palace if you like. It's nearer."

"No, no, there are thousands there. The camp in Yorkshire is much smaller, I know. I've heard about it. You'll be more comfortable there."

"It may not be for very long."

"It will, it will. We'd better face it. Yesterday you said yourself that it would go on for years."

"I'll find out when we can have visitors and let you know at once."

"Arnold, I love you so. It's awful for us to be separated again. My son doesn't belong to me any more. I've no one but you in the world, and I adore you more than ever."

"Worse separations than this are the fashion today, Laura; they happen by hundreds, by thousands every day, and they're final."

"Yes, I know." She held him more tightly, then suddenly let him go, saying, "We must get ready. It will be cold there. You'll want warm things."

He got his big suit-case out of a spare room and they packed it. The tears ran down her cheeks and fell on her hands as she packed and folded his clothes. Sendler wrote some letters and talked to her about money-matters, as though he were going away for a few days on business. When they went downstairs Olga came out into the hall, and Laura saw that she too had been crying.

"Take care of her, Olga."

"Arnold, I shan't let this rest, I promise you. I'll have you out, somehow. If the General can't help us, he'll know of someone who can."

"C'est la guerre," said Sendler, smiling. "As long as man

continues to settle his disputes in this illogical and obsolete manner, such things will occur."

He and Laura kissed again at the door.

"I'll write to you every day, my darling," she said.

"And I'll write to you as often as they'll let me. Wouldn't you be happier in the country, perhaps? Get Martha Stubbs to stay with you in the cottage, or you stay with her."

"I'll see. I'll be all right. It's you . . ."

"Don't worry about me. I'll be all right. Now, constable, let's be off."

The policeman had been staring upward, ignoring the good-byes, his ruddy face, with the helmet strap cutting across the chin, perfectly expressionless. Now he became brisk and active again, and walked ahead of Sendler out of the door.

"I'll send your trunk on the day after tomorrow."

"No hurry. I've enough here for a week or two."

The hall was darkened, the only light was covered over with blue paper, and Laura stood in the doorway watching the two figures fade out of sight in the dimly lighted street. When she could no longer hear Sendler's footsteps, she turned away and shut the door. She stood leaning against it, feeling that the world was slipping away from her. Olga brought her some brandy and she drank it, and the two sat talking until the General's car—which she often used when he did not need it himself—came to fetch Olga home.

A few days later Laura received Sendler's first letter, which was stamped, "Opened by Censor."

"My dearest—

"I shall do well enough here, I think. We're very well treated and most of my fellow prisoners seem glad enough to be in a safe place, far from the attentions of over-patriotic citizens. The camp is on the side of a hill, which makes for good drainage and dry ground, and we live in well-built army huts, so many to a hut. There isn't much privacy, but I didn't expect that. We're not allowed off the premises, needless to say, but there's a good deal of space to move about in. There's a football ground, of course, and there are tennis courts, a concert hall, a lecture room and a library. Current novels are sent to us from Boot's, if you please! The local tradesmen call regularly, and we are allowed as many parcels as kind friends like to send us. There isn't a woman in the place, so if you had moved heaven and earth you couldn't have come with me, and I think it is better so. The South African War and my wanderings in different parts of the world have made me accustomed to fewer comforts than fall to our lot here, but I think you would find it primitive in the extreme.

"Each hut has its chosen captain, and (like a new boy in a school) I look forward to the day when I may perhaps hold such a proud position myself. This captain deals with the authorities when requests or complaints must be made, and acts as spokesman for the hut. We are allowed a pound a week pocket money, and twice a week are permitted to communicate with the outside world. We are allowed visitors once a week, but once in three, or once a month will be often enough for you to make this long journey. I will find out what hotels there are near at hand for the accommodation of guests. Richard might come to see me one day, if his wife will allow it. I would be very glad to see him. Poor boy, I would rather be interned here for life than married to that woman for the duration of the war.

"When I write again I will send you a list of the books I want. If the war lasts long enough I will emerge from this place with a completed manuscript to my credit, and one with which I hope you will be pleased.

"Yes, I think it would be a good thing for you to stay for a while with Martha Stubbs. She will take good care of you, and I shall be happier when I know you are out of London. Has Olga made up what she is pleased to call her mind about marrying her general? Why does she wait? I have known a good many generals, tell her, and there is one thing that is true of them all—they don't grow younger.

"Don't worry about me. Once I begin to write the time will pass fairly quickly, and I can therefore bear this adversity better than most men could. Keep up your courage and love me always as I love you."

Laura succeeded in finding someone to take the house off her hands, for she found it unbearably lonely without Sendler. She was packing one day to go to the country when Richard came to see her. He seemed very cheerful, kissed her affectionately, questioned her about Sendler, and then told her he had just joined the Rifle Brigade and had accepted a commission.

Tears of combined thankfulness and grief rushed to her eyes.

"Yes, I've done it at last. I know exactly what you've been feeling, and everybody else, but I couldn't have done it now if she hadn't gone over to Paris to see her father, who's ill there."

"But Richard, darling, why are you so afraid of her?"

"I don't know. I am. She can do anything she likes with me. I'm just weak, I suppose. But it'll be too late for her to stop me when she comes back." He patted Laura's shoulder, looking over her head. "Anyway, I hope you're pleased, mother."

"Oh, how can I say I'm glad? I wanted you to do what was right, and you have, so I must be glad of that, but I hate war so, I hate it so bitterly. I always have."

"I know. There doesn't seem to be much sense in it. But I don't believe we could have done anything else, and I know I'm a coward not to have gone sooner. But you don't know Ernestine. She has a will like iron, and when she wants a thing I can't say no to her. You don't like her, and I can understand that. She doesn't seem to want to be liked, but I'm wild about her, I love her as I never thought I could love anybody, and if anything should happen to me —well, watch over her a little, you and Arnold, will you? You won't be able to do much with her, I can't, but I'd be glad if you'd do what you could."

"My darling, you needn't have asked me that." For a moment there was silence, and when she dared to look at him she saw that there were tears in his eyes. "When she knows, what do you think she'll do?"

"She'll loathe me, I suppose, but I can't help it. If I'd had to wait till they came and fetched me, I'd have shot myself."

"Anything," Laura thought, "is better than this slavery. Anything."

But when he had gone, shortly before midnight, she wondered if she were really such a Spartan mother as to be able to say that with sincerity. Alone in the quiet house, separated from Sendler and with Richard's voice still sounding in her ears she felt the utmost desolation; sadness and melancholy took possession of her. She saw all the peoples of the world packed into fast-moving trains, hurtling toward their doom. Who would wish to be born only to take that dreadful and inevitable journey? And it seemed to her that Richard was now on a train that moved faster than the rest. It had pulled up beside hers and was swiftly leaving her behind. And the roar of his passing was in her ears.

"If I lie awake and think these thoughts I shall go out of my mind," she thought, and going into the dining-room she poured herself out a generous whiskey and soda, which she took up with her to her room. There was hardly a sound to break the silence, only the faint noise made by Mrs. Bingle the cook as she went upstairs to bed. The last raids had been highly disastrous to the Zeppelins, and raids by aeroplanes had not yet begun, but Laura knew that every night poor Mrs. Bingle went up to bed she felt she would never wake again, and postponed the act until the latest possible moment. She was glad that she was taking her back to the country again, and glad to be going herself. There was no one like Stubbs: her homely matter-of-factness was invaluable just now, and her cottage smelt of straw matting and lavender. She would stay with her for the present, coming up to London to see Richard whenever he could get leave. She couldn't bear the thought of Friday Cottage without Sendler. The whiskey sent her spirits up a trifle and numbed the pain of her thoughts. She gathered together the books she meant to take to the country with her, among them Housman's poems to re-read; heavy and dark with fate though they were she liked few better. She wasn't sorry to be leaving the Red Cross depot; to many of the women the war had brought only increased opportunity and a vastly inflated idea of their own importance. A few of them had spiteful little minds and talked about the other women as Laura knew very well they talked about her when her back was turned. She also knew that they secretly rejoiced when they heard that Sendler had been one of the many enemy aliens interned. Sendler, shut away from her, herded with hundreds of other men whose only crime was that they had been born where they had been born and not elsewhere . . . !

She extinguished her light and went to the window, drawing up the blind. How the stars burned! One night she had seen a group of them suddenly blotted out by the passing of one of those great, silent, bloated, gas-filled monsters of war, and a moment later the bombs had come crashing down, to blow to pieces some poor families living in poor little houses on the other side of the river. There was the Galaxy flowing across the sky, a superb, breath-taking sight, a great star-river whose every bright drop was a world already made, or worlds in the making. She remembered looking at it from her window in the turret room of Dunochty Castle, while Horace tiptoed across the floor toward her for that kiss that had completely changed her life and his. Horace! It was impossible for her to think of him as dead. The vitality of a great egoist seems to conquer even death. How Leighton and Armytage must be humming these days! How the Leighton and Armytages of the world must be humming, as they manufactured dreadful and premature deaths for her son and other women's sons, poor human creatures who must die soon enough, and with little enough done, without their aid.

It would be peaceful in Surrey tomorrow and she could talk to Martha Stubbs as to herself. Mrs. Bingle, upstairs, got into her bed, making the springs creak noisily. Laura was glad of the sound, glad of the nearness of a human being. "I hope I shall never have to live in a big house again," she thought, her mind going back to Stratford Place. It had been sold two years before. Oxford Street had become quite impossible with its crowds and its traffic, and now dentists had their offices in her old home.

A policeman walked by with impressive, unhurried, reassuring tread. The tiny light from his electric torch played down into an area and upwards into a window, a minute, inquiring beam. All was well, and he passed on, as comforting as the whistle of a locomotive on a stormy night.

CHAPTER XVII

Laura had come up to London from Friday Cottage to do some shopping for her grandson before he went back to school. To do anything at all for her grandson was a pleasure, and now, buying his socks and ties and underclothes was particularly agreeable because until a few days ago it had looked as though his mother, that hard woman, might take him with her to South America, the other side of the world. But thank heaven she had at last agreed to leave the boy in England with Arnold and herself. They adored him and he loved them, and for the last year he had been making quite remarkable progress in school—the first uninterrupted year he had ever had. The happiest times of his life had been spent at Friday Cottage with his dogs and his pony. How he hated the suite at Claridge's and the villa at Cannes! And lately his mother had wanted, no one knew why, to take him to Rio with that rich Argentine she was marrying. They were long past minding what she did if only she would leave Roland with them. Let her marry whom she pleased and as often as she pleased. This was her third marriage. She wore her skirts to her knees now, displaying slim, passionless legs. Her black hair was cut very short, showing small, white ears, and her lips that had once been thin and colourless were now thin and scarlet. She wore immense pearls in her ears and a single pearl—the gift of Lord Deltmar, her second husband—on her right hand. No one knew why she had divorced Lord Deltmar, and no one knew why she was marrying the Argentine. Her ways, in fact, were past finding out, but who cared what she did if only she left Roland where he was?

Laura made her way toward Harrods, her shopping list in her purse, and as she walked her mind flitted back thirty years and she recalled the day when she had taken Richard, aged thirteen, to see the wonderful new moving staircase Harrods had installed, a copy of the one at the Magasin du Louvre in Paris, and how he had ridden on it again and again and again until she had finally to command him to leave it, so fascinated was he. A gust of cold wind assailed her and she shivered, feeling thankful for the warm fur coat Sendler had given her for Christmas, early January days being the hardest of all for blood that is turning thin. She had a long list of books to get for him. What a reader the man was! She considered that she was a good reader herself, but he got through twice as many books as she did, and remembered far better what he read. He had the advantage of a trained mind. Someone had recently spoken of him as the greatest English authority on pacts and treaties, forgetting how lately he had been a German. His last book, mercilessly criticizing the treaty of Versailles (where he had gone as interpreter and correspondent), had brought him much prominence, and he had lately been offered a professorship at the London University but had declined, owing to his dislike of academic duties.

Those two and a half years in the internment camp had aged him and made his hair much greyer. Since first they had met and loved each other they had had to spend nine years apart—nine years, among so few! Laura now made it her business to keep him as far as possible from annoyances, for nowadays he didn't suffer fools with politeness or resignation. She recalled an incident that had happened only a few days before, when Mr. Phillips had come to see him and while her back was turned had somehow slipped into the library. Sendler seemed to have a peculiar fascination for the little parson, who continually sought opportunities of talking with him and was untroubled by rebuffs. That day he had come to talk politics. Didn't Mr. Sendler consider that the Kellogg Peace Pact was a dangerous document? Wasn't America, under the pretense of outlawing war, increasing her navy as rapidly as possible? Wasn't she merely trying to tie England's hands, to cripple her, for no good purpose? Didn't he think her attitude in regard to the Freedom of the Seas quite outrageous?

"America is much too rich and arrogant," he said. "She's got completely above herself. If there should be another war, which heaven forbid, I hope it will be one which will involve that country and bring her down from her high estate to her knees. We all know that pride goeth before a fall, and if ever a country walked in excessive pride, America does."

Laura had come in in time to hear Sendler's wrath unloosed on the little man's head.

"You're all alike, you parsons. The feebler you are physically the more you delight in the thought of violence. I am never so convinced of the moribundity of the Church than I am during a war, when her attitude is one of craven subservience to the military power. If the Catholic Church, in 1914, had threatened to excommunicate all its members who declared war or took up arms, if all churches in all countries had joined together in condemning war, we might have had no war, for in those days the Church had more power. But not a voice was raised. How well I remember, in 1900, during the Boer War, going out of curiosity to listen to a sermon of Father Stanton's. I've never forgotten his attitude, his words, and it was the same attitude and the same words used by all of you in 1914. 'This dreadful war,' he said, 'has brought out all the old spirit of manliness. One hears of souls steeped in sloth and luxury rising up to leave all that is pleasant and go to discomfort, danger, and possibly death. And if you ask why, the answer is always the same. Because I can't help it. For God, for Country, for Old England, I *must*.' For God, if you please! Our wholesale murders, our organized killings, are acceptable to God, are they? The best way to bring out the 'old spirit of manliness' is to set a man to slay his brother. A recruiting sermon, neither more nor less. And not a word uttered against war, the curse of the world, man's greatest insanity. No, you're a lot of moral cowards, all of you."

"Arnold!" Laura remonstrated, gently.

"I can't help it, Laura. This man who hasn't the strength to carry a rifle or the guts to fly an aeroplane comes and talks to me with relish of a possible war involving the country nearest to us and friendliest to us. It sickens me. All over the world there are people who talk in this loose and mischievous way and they go unpunished."

"I only meant," said Mr. Phillips, but was not allowed to finish.

"You haven't sufficient imagination," Sendler went on, "to conceive of the horrors of modern warfare. While you're here you might just listen to this." He flipped open the pages of the first volume of Winston Churchill's "World Crisis." "Here is a man who is at least imaginatively capable of understanding what war is like and of writing finely about it. If at any time you must talk about war and about the part played by man in war, quote from some such source as this. Here we are. Page thirteen. It explains itself. 'Freed in the main by his intelligence from medieval fears, he marched to death with sombre dignity. His nervous system was found in the 20th century capable of enduring physical and moral stresses before which the simpler natures of primeval times would have collapsed. Again and again to the hideous bombardment, again and again from the hospital to the front, again and again to the hungry submarines, he strode unflinching. And withal, as an individual, preserved through these torments the glories of a reasonable and compassionate mind.' That is a fine, if slightly optimistic statement, though on the whole true. And when I say optimistic, I am thinking of the nervous systems that could not endure, and betrayed the bravest. War isn't just a fine noise, Mr. Phillips, and the humbling of the arrogant. It is an appalling ordeal inflicted upon sensitive bodies capable of feeling almost infinite pain; upon delicately adjusted and highly complex nervous systems; and it is very apt to result in the humble being still further humbled, and the arrogant being raised up. I beg you to keep your warlike talk for the elderly spinsters who gather at your sewing bees."

"If my husband has finished lecturing you, Mr. Phillips," said Laura, "perhaps you will come out and see the chrysanthemums that I got from you last year."

"I should like to," said the little man, getting up.

But in spite of this irritability, and a tendency to dwell upon annoyances after they were past, Laura well knew that Sendler was a contented man. She too was content, or as content as a woman can be who has suffered the loss of her only son. The terrible wound left by Richard's death in the black days of May, 1918, could never heal, and for years she couldn't think of it without her mind reeling with pain. He had never seen his son, born three months after his death, nor had he ceased to be partially estranged from his wife, who chose to treat him with great coldness. Without Sendler, Laura thought she too would have wished to die, though for the last four or five years she had been able to think about it with a lessening agony. But comfort she had not found and could not find, for she was no more able to believe in a heaven where they would be united again than she could believe in Santa Claus. Nor could Sendler. Laura was of the opinion that death ended everything, but Sendler was far less ready to discard the idea of any and every sort of continued consciousness. In fact he had a theory of his own, which he tried to express and explain from time to time. As far as Laura could gather, it was this. It seemed to her that he believed in a kind of permanence for consciousness, which meant perpetual life of a sort. Consciousness was thought, and the chemical changes, or radiation, that worked upon our bodies and upon all matter, continually altering it, had no such power over thought, which had an eternal and unalterable existence. We lived every instant of our lives in perpetuity, the drama enacted itself for ever in a time-space as yet unknown to us.

"Then if I die," she had asked him, "am I at once born again into the same life, and without memory of having lived it before?"

"It isn't *again*, exactly," he would try to explain. "You don't use the words again and before in connection with a thing that is continuous, that exists for ever."

Laura, with a feminine liking for the concrete, said, "Then you and I meet at the Abingers for ever and for ever? Me wearing that white silk dress with the lace let into the sleeves and the flounce of the skirt, and a small fan in my hand, and my hair in a fringe and a chignon? And you with that look that made me think of James, and that charming accent that I resented then, and your profile that I thought so like Goethe's? It all goes on for ever?"

"You put it crudely," he answered, "but in a sense I do mean that."

"But the silk of my dress is rotted and gone, and the fan is broken, and my hair is grey . . ."

"It is no truer to say that than to say your dress is new, your fan perfect, your hair brown. Or to say that your dress, your fan, your hair, are all dust. All those states have the same validity, the same permanence."

"Then James runs down to that beach for ever and he falls, and his heart stops beating; and Richard . . ."

"Those are only moments as other moments are. They can have no more validity or permanence than the others. Why single them out?"

But all the same she liked to think of herself as climbing the stairs to Sendler's rooms, tapping lightly on his door and then being drawn into his arms, while the windows of the unlovely room framed the blue and premature twilight of a November day. To have that again . . . no, not again, but always, always . . .

When she had finished her shopping she went to lunch with Olga, who was now Mrs. Ogden-Shaw and lived in a house in Knightsbridge that turned its back upon the traffic of the street and looked, as rurally as it might, over the fine stretches of Hyde Park. Olga was now placidly happy and comfortable. She had gained little and lost little. She played bridge a great deal, though never very well, and went abroad every year with the General—now retired—who hated English winters. She still had Pennyfields, and the two couples often went there for week-ends together when Roland was away at school.

Olga envied her the possession of Roland as she had once envied her Richard.

"Why don't you adopt a child?" Laura sometimes asked her. "You're so fond of children and get on so well with them."

But Olga assured her that John wouldn't hear of it, and besides, a child would probably complicate and sometimes upset their lives. Olga was trying very hard at this time to keep her weight down and her face from sagging, and was succeeding very well in both, though it cost her a great deal both in time and money. She always dressed in black; beautiful clothes that never seemed to change much from year to year, but came from the best Paris houses. With these she wore two fine strings of pearls. Her hair was almost entirely white now, and her large, dark eyes and large, handsome features made her very noticeable. She and the General got on very well, though she detested his relations and described their peculiarities to Laura with malicious relish.

After lunch the two women went to a concert at the Queen's Hall, and later returned to Olga's house for a cup of tea. Being with Olga acted on Laura as a sedative. She was the apostle of Things-as-they-are; the world in which she found herself was the only world she could imagine, and only as changes came about—provided they didn't too much alter the established order of things—did she countenance the thought of them. But she was full of kindness, she was loyal unto death, she was cheerful, she was unchanging. Only once, when Sendler came into Laura's life, did their friendship run a risk of diminution. Now she was his most enthusiastic admirer, and was not at all pleased when she was reminded of her early hostility. The two women talked about the past, about meetings in the past, and about the changes time had made in their lives. Laura grieved over missed opportunities, wasted years. She ought to have learnt more, thought more, studied more. She loved music and there was the whole continent of music as yet barely discovered by her. Every man must be his own Columbus in these matters, and she felt that her own adventurings had been lamentably few and tame. Yes, she regretted that more than anything, she told Olga, but got little sympathy or support from her friend. Olga saw no point in learning more than was strictly necessary and immediately useful, not, at any rate, for women like themselves. It was only upsetting, and led to their seeking knowledge along rough paths only to find that there was no discovering the truth except through faith, which provided a sort of miraculous short-cut. "I don't trust your short-cuts," Laura told her. "I'm constitutionally incapable of placing any reliance on them. Mere faith would have kept us forever in the Dark Ages. But we shall never agree about such things." What a very different woman Olga would have been, she thought, if Arthur had lived. Some women went along with a man as far as he could take them and when he left them stood completely still, awaiting another impetus. Olga had ceased to move in 1887. She thought she accepted modern life; and in a sense she did accept it, in that she didn't actually fight it, but took what good things it brought, uncritically. She and the General thoroughly enjoyed their wireless in the evening, and it was amusing to pick up Paris or Berlin. She liked to feel that if her dressmaker in Paris should be behindhand with a dress it could reach her by aeroplane on the very day on which she wished to wear it. She thought people today very like people had been forty years ago, except that they had more freedom, and as for that ridiculously talked-about creature the modern girl, she had been a very modern girl herself, so there was nothing in that. No, as the General always said, the thing to do was not to get excited. Old England had rolled on for a good many years and would roll on for a good many more. It was true that unemployment was bad and that the industrial outlook generally might be brighter, but it was no good blaming the government for what couldn't be helped, and if the Socialists were in power it was very doubtful if they could do better. Nobody was very much afraid of them nowadays, but at the same time nobody believed they could work miracles, and we were undoubtedly safer as we were. "Trust the Government," the General was in the habit of saying, and Olga thought this a very good principle. Some people talked very enthusiastically about what the twentieth century had brought, but Olga couldn't see that things were so very different. In London people still talked about smoke-abatement, just as they had when she was a girl, and only the other day the dear old Channel Tunnel had cropped up again. It seemed just like old times. What jokes they used to make about it! And how was Olga to know what deep changes were going on below the surface, Laura thought, as she never read, and when anyone told her of these things, didn't listen? Later she kissed her friend good-bye very affectionately, promising to convey her love and good wishes to Sendler and a kiss to Roland, and then, refusing to let the maid call a taxi, it being a fine, clear evening, walked slowly down toward Hyde Park Corner, breathing deeply of the cold air, for Olga's drawing-room had been uncomfortably warm. No, to Olga the present was the simple present, and she visualized no future, nor cared to, while to Laura today was already the past, ages old and dark with ignorance. Oh, to know, to know, to know! thought Laura, lifting her face to the provocative stars. How irritating to be standing only at the dawn of things, to see the veil raised only a fraction, to know that only in this young century had we learnt a tiny something of the fundamental mechanism of the universe! She and Arnold grieved and fretted together over this. "The primary matter of the universe appears to consist of elements whose existence we are only just beginning to suspect," a great astronomer had just said. "Only just beginning to suspect," Laura repeated to Sendler. "And it is at such a moment as this, if you please, that you and I must make our exit. What abominable unfairness!"

"Ah, well, ah, well!" She dismissed the unpleasing thought, and her mind going back to the concert she began to hum one of the themes in the Beethoven Symphony she had heard that afternoon. Certainly she must hear more music, and she meant to keep Sendler to his promise of buying her one of the new and improved gramophones so that she could listen to all her favourite records whenever she pleased. Roland, too, had a great fondness for music which both she and Sendler were anxious to encourage. How Arnold loved the boy! They were a contented little family, more contented still now that Martha Stubbs had come to take up her residence with them permanently. The only shadow that hung over them was the fear that Roland's mother, that unlovely woman, would take the boy away, out of their care and their lives, a dreadful prospect.

But at the moment Laura was happy. Horatia was coming over in the spring, bringing with her her eldest daughter, and this it was delightful to anticipate. At the corner of Hyde Park she looked at the clock and saw that it was a quarter to six. Her train left Victoria at six-thirty, and she would be home by seven thirty-five, in time to say good-night to Roland. There was no need to take a taxi yet, and she turned into the Park for a few minutes, and there stood looking up. Orion was over behind St. George's Hospital and out of sight, but the Galaxy was remarkably clear, in spite of London smoke, though doubtless not nearly so brilliant as it would be from the lawn of Friday Cottage. The sky at night had an ever increasing fascination for her. There were times, indeed, when she felt herself beaten to earth by the terrible battalions of the stars; there were other times, and tonight was one, when she was soothed and calmed by the sheer beauty of their infinite number. For some time she stood looking up, and then, a little blinded and dazzled by them, she stepped off the pavement, and a silent, swiftly moving, metallic mass with yellow headlights felled her. In ten seconds there was a small crowd about her, in twenty she was being borne across the street to St. George's Hospital.

She was conscious, but not of what was going on around her. A curious thing was happening inside her head. To the accompaniment of that lovely movement of the Beethoven Symphony she was watching a sort of screen picture being passed before her eyes. Something was pressing into her back at the same time, and this she attributed to the knee of some thoughtless person in the row behind, and it scarcely distracted her attention from the screen. She was watching the events of her own life, but it seemed that some benevolent Censor had been at work and had eliminated all but the events in which she had taken pleasure. Scene after scene flickered before her eyes; Hyde Park, sixty years ago, with its billowy ladies and willowy men, her father's large, firm hand holding hers; nursery teas, with sugar-covered buns, and warm fires; James, and the delight of his nearness; games with him and with Violet, and her little sister's beautiful hair; mamma's presence, sweet and comforting then; her proud walk to church with a young brother and a young sister on either hand; the sea-side, and Miss Mossbanks showing them a crab; bathing, herself the best swimmer and not at all afraid; the face of a delightful dog they had once had; the British Museum with James; the blushes and confusion of Mr. Lamb, her first admirer; her first ball; ices in a conservatory; her first meeting with Olga, and the thrill of a new friend; tennis at Amelia Bonner's; roller-skating, and the delight of the flying movement; the promenade at Cowes, and the pleasure she took in her tightly fitting blue fisherman's jersey; the look of Kensington Square in winter; herself buying stuffs for dresses and the pleasant feel of them in her fingers; a garden party, and the smell of grass trodden underfoot; going to the Derby on a coach; herself and James taking Ouida out of the little cupboard in his room; talks with Mr. John, and the admiration of Mrs. Lovelace; the moors; Horace in tweeds, and the wind whistling mournfully down his gun-barrel; his foot-step in her room and the fearful, unforgettable delight of her first kiss; her wedding, her diamond spray, her blue plush going-away costume; the South of France; Horace and herself driving about San Remo in an open carriage; her new drawing-room, and her first tea-party there; her first sight of Horatia's downy head; Martha Stubbs hanging up her dresses, and turning on her bath water; her son, and Horace's approval of him; the flicker of firelight in the nursery, and the children asleep and warm in their beds; Pennyfields, and the woods there, and the children playing in the grassy rides; Lilla and James, happy together, like two birds; James's first book of poems; herself and Olga at a forbidden Ibsen play; Violet's wedding; the sharp joy of going for the first time to "The Meistersinger"; the delight of her new brougham; herself in a most becoming sealskin wrap; her meeting with Sendler; that first lunch with him; herself climbing the stairs to his rooms; and on and on and on . . . what a galaxy of scenes and faces and delights; as many, she thought, as the stars in the Milky Way . . .

The pressure of the knee in her back increased. She didn't want to make a fuss, but it was really beginning to mar her enjoyment of the pictures. People were often very thoughtless. If he would only move his knee a trifle to one side or the other, the pain would stop. Perhaps he would if she spoke to him. She turned around to remonstrate and at once the pictures ceased, the lights went out, the theatre was all dark . . .

CHAPTER I

Laura Alicia Deverell was born on May 10th, 1862, at precisely a quarter past one o'clock on a Thursday morning. Those interested in that pseudo-science astrology or astromancy may trace her life and character, if they wish, among the stars, where no doubt it is all written.

She opened her eyes upon a large, dark bedroom, badly illuminated by gas, in a house in Mecklenburg Square. . . .

(1)

THE END

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